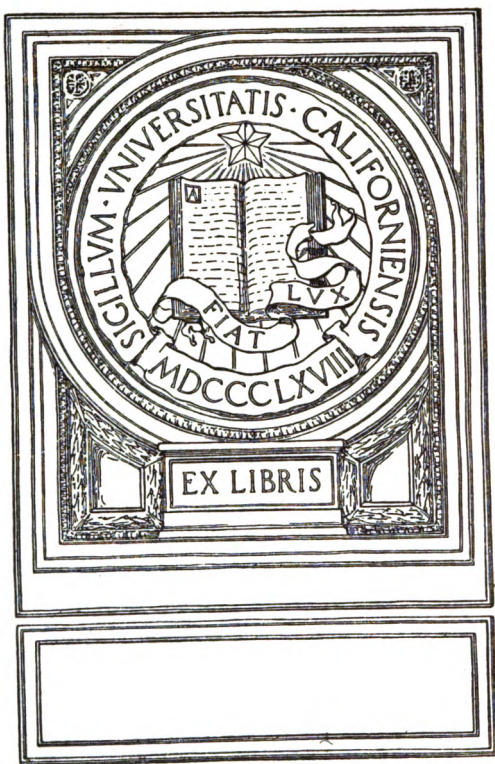

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GUN-RUNNING IN THE GULF

GUN-RUNNING IN THE GULF AND OTHER ADVENTURES

BY
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PREFACE

It has been suggested to me that certain stories written in my leisure moments since I retired from the army, six years ago, might appeal to a wider public than readers of the several magazines in which they originally appeared. It is with some trepidation on my part, however, that this collection of tales is launched forth in book form to face the criticism of pundits. Nevertheless, as it was my good fortune during my soldiering days to travel extensively, and see much, the personal pleasure I have derived from attempting to record some episodes from out of the past cannot be taken from me; though that pleasure will, naturally, be immeasurably enhanced should it prove that my readers derive equal entertainment from their perusal.

The majority of these tales have appeared in *The Cornhill Magazine*; and to the kindly encouragement of its Editor I here take the opportunity of tendering my most sincere thanks. I am greatly indebted also to the Editor of *Blackwood's* for excerpts from "Gun-running in the

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Gulf," " Rifle Thieves of Iraq," and " The Taming of the Narai Tangi." For " The Tale of a Treasured Cargo " and " Wrecked by a Berthon Boat," my thanks are due to the Editor of *The Blue Peter Magazine*. " The Two Inseparables " appeared in *The Wide World Magazine*, and " Naivasha in the 'Nineties " in *The National Review*. To their Editors also I wish to express my obligations.

H. H. A.

SOUTHBOURNE-ON-SEA,
June, 1926.

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UNITED STATES OF CALIFORNIA

GUN-RUNNING IN THE GULF

The operations on the N.W. Frontier of India which seem at last to have come to a close, after several weary years of fighting in Waziristan, have probably attracted the attention of many to the protracted resistance of these hardy, truculent mountaineers to the well-equipped forces dispatched by the Government of India to reduce them to order. That the physical difficulties of the country traversed by our troops are great is perhaps common knowledge, as also the fact that the region is practically unproductive, and therefore quite unable to support any force operating amid its rugged hills and rocky gorges. Until the recent construction of roads, communications, in the proper sense of the word, did not exist. Formerly columns of all arms were obliged to march along the stony beds of mountain torrents, with their long lines of transport animals stretched out on a narrow front, and shut in by steep and often precipitous heights. These had to be crowned by picquets as the column advanced, and the picquets had to remain at their posts

until the last of the baggage animals and rear-guard had cleared each successive danger-point throughout the seemingly interminable defiles of these barren highlands.

Under such conditions our troops in India have been accustomed to conduct mountain warfare, for generations past, against the unruly inhabitants of the N.W. Frontier; but until comparatively late years the ill-disciplined and ill-armed trans-frontier men were seldom able to withstand, for any time, the steady and relentless converging advance of mobile columns into the heart of their country. After suffering relatively few casualties in personnel, by futilely opposing such advances, the recalcitrant tribes were, nevertheless, usually soon willing to submit to *force majeure* when they saw their villages destroyed, their tall defensible towers blown up, and their scanty crops utilized for feeding the animals of the invading columns; whilst their women and children were compelled to seek asylums in almost inaccessible and probably snow-bound fastnesses during the rigours of winter.

Such was, at all events, the experience of the Waziristan Expedition of 1894-5, under the command of the late General Sir William Lockhart. The difficulties experienced in the more recent operations against the Mahsuds point to a very different state of things; for our old opponents

have apparently not only advanced materially in their tactical methods—the result, no doubt, of instruction by men of their clan who have previously served in our frontier battalions and militia—but in the matter of armament also they are infinitely better off than they were thirty years ago. The old *jezail*, or flint-lock muzzle-loader, with prongs near end of barrel to hold the weapon steady—by resting them on the ground or a rock when firing from a prone or crouching position—has probably gone for ever. In the place of this medieval firearm, with a range of only a few hundred yards, the Mahsuds now possess possibly thousands of modern breech-loading rifles sighted up to 2,000 yards and more ; and, since these hardy mountaineers have eyes like hawks and thoroughly understand the use of these weapons, it will be readily appreciated how their possession has added enormously to the fighting power of this truculent and restless tribe.

The question naturally arises, “ By what means have the Mahsuds and other frontier tribes become possessed of these modern arms of precision ? ” It is clear they cannot all have been acquired by skilful thefts from frontier stations or purchases in India ; nor can the late Amir of Afghanistan be accused of supplying all these tens of thousands of rifles to our border tribes from the output of his arsenal at Kabul.

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Another large possible source of supply had therefore to be sought and investigated; and the attention of the Government of India accordingly became focussed, some years ago, on Masqat in particular, and the Persian Gulf generally. By some oversight, not now easily understood, in former treaties drawn up by the French and ourselves with the Sultan of Masqat, the importation of firearms from Europe into Masqat was not prohibited. Arabs, Persians, Baluchis, and others, were free, therefore, to purchase rifles and pistols quite openly in Masqat town, and dispose of them as they pleased. The trade promised lucrative returns, without fear of let or hindrance, to Europeans and those who had the means of arranging for purchases abroad, and setting up as arms merchants in Masqat. This opportunity was readily seized upon by men with little or no conscience or concern as to what became of these rifles, and into whose hands they ultimately found their way, after they were sold from their shops. For this reason Masqat gradually developed into the Arms Emporium of the Middle East, and the Sultan himself waxed wealthy on the licences granted for the importation of arms, and the commissions paid to him on each consignment landed in his territory, by steamers from Europe laden with them.

French, German, and Belgian firms chiefly supplied the arms required by the merchants at Masqat; but more than one British firm did not abstain from a similar practice, though this was done possibly in ignorance of the serious results likely to follow their action. In any case, the whole of Masqat, from the Sultan downwards, became deeply steeped in the arms trade; and contracts were made by, and licences granted to, local merchants for the importation of arms from Europe for several years in advance. During the four or five years preceding 1909 the trade in arms in the Gulf had increased by leaps and bounds, and so remunerative had the undertaking proved that many Afghans and trans-frontier Pathans were attracted to the Gulf from distant Kabul and Herat, as well as our own border. To give some idea of the fortunes made by the arms merchants in Masqat, I may instance the case of a Frenchman, M. Goguyer by name, who died at Masqat in November, 1909, or thereabouts. Ten years previously he had entered that town with very slender resources; but turning his attention to the arms trade, he had amassed a considerable fortune (reputed to be £40,000) at the time of his death. His store at Masqat in the spring of 1909 was estimated to contain not less than 100,000 arms of many different types, including most patterns of modern magazine rifles, and

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certainly not less than 10,000,000 rounds of ammunition for these arms.

The Government of India realized, therefore, that the unrestricted traffic in arms in the Gulf might seriously jeopardize our position *vis-à-vis* the tribes on our frontier, and an endeavour was made to come to terms with France at the Brussels Arms Conference, extending from early in 1908 onwards, with a view to proclaiming Masqat, in agreement with the Sultan, to be a prohibited port. But, for reasons into which I need not enter here, France did not at that time appear disposed to see eye to eye with us on the subject.

Some time previously it was within the certain knowledge of the Government of India that many Afghans were yearly making a pilgrimage to the Gulf for the purchase of arms, though in what numbers these were being conveyed thence to Afghanistan and the tribes on our frontier was unknown. In the cold weather of 1908-9, however, secret-service agents wandering about in disguise along the Makran coast reported the presence of large caravans of Afghans, accompanied by camels, from Kabul and Herat. These awaited consignments of arms purchased by some of their number in Masqat, whence they were transported in dhows to pre-arranged landing-places on the opposite coast. Here men and animals were ready to receive them, and the whole party would

then set off on their return journey to Afghanistan via Seistan. Careful statistics compiled from the reports of these men, and also from officials of the Indo-European Telegraph Department, employed on the Makran coast and up-country, pointed to the probability of over 30,000 rifles of different patterns, with at least 100 rounds of ammunition for each, being landed during that cold season—a considerable proportion of which, it was conjectured, would eventually find their way into the hands of the N.W. Frontier tribes of India.

It was obvious, therefore, that if the future security of our border was to be efficiently maintained, and arms prevented from reaching the lawless tribesmen, drastic measures must be undertaken to check their flow from the Gulf. As already stated, France declined for long to co-operate with us in this matter, and it became incumbent on Britain to take action unaided. A further complication arose owing to the fact that the great majority of the arms conveyed to Afghanistan and our N.W. Frontier were landed on Persian soil; and Persia had placed no embargo or restrictions in the way of the importation of arms along her southern coast-line. In fact, she appeared averse to interfering with the evil; and the Baluch sirdars of Persian Baluchistan were all making, in consequence, considerable

sums of money—paid to them as commission on every rifle and pistol landed within their territory by the gun-runners.

The difficulties of dealing with the situation were, therefore, great. The importation of arms from Europe to Masqat could not be stopped, nor could these arms be seized anywhere within the Sultan's dominions, or at sea within the three-mile limit of his coast-line. Strictly speaking, also, once they were landed on Persian soil they were immune from capture; so it was desirable to seize them on the high seas during their transit in dhows from the Arabian coast to Makran.

During the cold weather of 1908-9 a few insignificant captures were made at sea by the few out-of-date patrolling ships available for this purpose; and attempts were also made to intercept the passage of arms caravans into Afghanistan by the posting of British troops in the neighbourhood of Robat, where the three kingdoms of Britain, Persia, and Afghanistan meet, south of Seistan. But that these measures were quite inadequate to deal with the growing evil is clearly evidenced by the fact that, in spite of them, some 30,000 rifles had found their way into Afghanistan. Operations on a far more extended scale were obviously essential; and as reports pointed to the probability of 3,000 Afghans visiting the Gulf in the cold season of 1909-10, during

which they hoped to acquire over 50,000 rifles, a really ambitious scheme was put into train to checkmate their persistent activities.

Now these Afghan gun-runners were men of great enterprise, and richly endowed with daring, cunning, and ingenuity of a high order. They were well provided with money, by the skilful outlay of which they counted on reaping profits of not less than 200 to 300 per cent. on the season's operations. Much of the capital collected for the venture was known to be borrowed; so it was pretty certain they would not easily be balked from their intentions to procure the arms which were in such great demand in their country and on our border. Information at hand pointed to the Ghilzais from Afghanistan, who had previously been the most inveterate gun-runners, being joined by Afridis, and other clans nominally under our control; so the danger was patently being brought home to us.

Hitherto the *modus operandi* of the Afghans had been quite straightforward and simple. Arrangements were made in their own country for large caravans of camels to be marched from Kabul, Herat, and other places during the cold season, to the Makran and Biaban coasts in Persian territory, under suitable guard. Meanwhile, those men told off for the actual purchase of the arms proceeded by rail through India to Karachi,

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with the necessary money concealed about their persons, and there took steamer to Masqat. On arrival they openly purchased such weapons as they desired from the various wholesale merchants, with whom they arranged to leave them until they had completed their preparations for having them conveyed by dhows to the opposite coast. Much ingenuity was displayed in selecting landing-places where they would be met by their accomplices with camels, in order to elude the vigilance of the patrolling ships and their cutters, and to remove immediately the arms landed into the interior. The common procedure then was to store their arms along the coast under charge of neighbouring Baluch chieftains. Certain meeting-places and dates having been pre-arranged for various parties to join up together, the united caravans would later march homewards in considerable strength through those parts of Persian territory where possibility of attack was most to be apprehended. Once safely back within their own borders, the parties again split up, and conveyed their valuable purchases to their most promising home markets.

Thus the first measure of check adopted was to institute means whereby Afghans should be denied permission to land at Masqat, from British India S.N. Company steamers plying to and from the Gulf. The Afghan reply to this was to take tickets

to other ports, such as Chahbar, Jashk, and Bandar Abbas, whence they found their way in native sailing crafts to points on the Arabian coast in the vicinity of Masqat.

Arrangements were then made to dam the flow of Afghans from British territory by refusing them passages on British steamers to any of the Gulf ports; and in November, 1909, a system of information was organized at both Bombay and Karachi to deal with Afghans who were suspected of being likely to endeavour to book passages under disguise. The British India S.N. Company had agreed to refuse tickets to Afghans; but another loophole still remained, as the Bombay-Persian S.N. Company also plied between Bombay, Karachi, and Gulf ports, and was under native management. Intending travellers by this line, therefore, required careful watching. Many were the cunning disguises and ingenious concealments of money resorted to by Afghans, who posed as Indian *bunniahs*, Arab horse-dealers, and pious Moslems bound on pilgrimage to the holy places in Mesopotamia and Arabia, in order to escape the vigilance of our alert police at British-India ports. But it was a case of diamond cut diamond; and when thousand-rupee notes were found innocently sewn up between the inner and outer soles of boots and shoes of guileless travellers, and other equally crafty stratagems employed, it was any odds their

ultimate destination was the Arms Emporium at Masqat.

These police precautions proved effective to some extent ; but these measures could only hope to touch the fringe of the movement, for there was no efficient means as yet of preventing the more enterprising spirits amongst the Afghans from secretly chartering sailing vessels at secluded Indian ports, and in them making the voyage across to the Arabian coast. One was faced, therefore, with the practical certainty that a considerable portion of the Afghans who had set forth from their homes well supplied with money would leave no stone unturned to reach Masqat.

The continued running of the gauntlet of the patrolling ships by fast-sailing dhows from the Arabian coast had still, therefore, to be reckoned with ; and much importance naturally hinged on timely information being conveyed of these intended trips, and their probable destination on the Persian coast, in order to facilitate the capture of arms on the high seas. The task of the Navy was difficult and onerous to a degree ; for it must be borne in mind there were some 350 miles of coast-line in Persian Baluchistan, between Gwatar to the east and Minab to the west, which were open to the gun-runners whereon to land their consignments of arms from Masqat and other points along the Arabian coast. The distance

across from Masqat to any place on the Persian coast between the Indo-European Telegraph-stations of Jashk and Chahbar nowhere exceeded 150 miles; so fast dhows could make the trip, under favourable conditions of wind and weather, in little more than twenty-four hours. But by coasting north from Masqat, in territorial waters, towards Ras Masandam, and then darting across the intervening space to the Biaban coast, the distance would be reduced to 40 or 50 miles. This passage could therefore be accomplished during the hours of darkness, and the arms landed and removed inland before daylight.

The problem confronting the naval authorities, who were ill-found in patrolling ships, and received little or no timely information as to sailings from the Arabian coast, nor the likely destination of these dhows on the opposite coast, was in consequence practically insoluble under the conditions obtaining up to the cold weather of 1909-10, and easily explains the comparative ill-success of their previous endeavours to disorganize the traffic in arms. In fact, little more than a happy fluke, such as a dhow being becalmed within the beat of a patrolling ship, was in the least likely to lead to an important capture.

As a first measure towards improving existing matters at sea, the Naval Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, had proposed to the Admiralty that

his ships in Eastern waters should be augmented by three second- and third-class cruisers, in order the more effectively to patrol the sea between the Persian and Arabian coasts. These did not, however, reach (in their entirety) the Gulf until the season was somewhat advanced; and early in December, 1909, the Senior Naval Officer in the Gulf had at his disposal only three ships—his own, H.M.S. *Fox* (4,600 tons), which was broken down in one engine, and therefore barely capable of steaming eight knots with one propeller; the *Lapwing*, an antiquated Royal Indian Marine ship of 850 tons, with a speed of about seven knots; and H.M.S. *Philomel* (2,600 tons), which had lately arrived from Bombay. To these must be added the *Whimbrel*, a sailing-boat of about 5 tons register, whose cheery captain and crew enjoyed a spicy and adventurous career, particularly when a stiff *shamal* was blowing and Afghans were lying in wait for her, in the hope that they might be able to greet her with a fusillade should she attempt to seek shelter in some neighbouring creek.

The Royal Indian Marine further added to the gaiety of nations by lending a hand, at times, with two other old tubs of theirs, dating back, I should say, to the “early ’forties,” and yclept the *Sphinx* and *Redbreast*. The former was provided with paddle-wheels, but there was little of mystery about her, as one could hear her churning

her way through a choppy sea, in the dim distance, almost before she appeared in sight herself. Her speed was not excessive; and as a dhow would always locate her, even if she didn't see her, and could, without much difficulty, make rings round her, the chances of this battle-ship overhauling a dhow, except in a dead calm, were distinctly remote. Still, she could patrol a beat.

At a later date, too, when the activities of the gun-runners embraced a still wider stretch of the Persian coast-line, extending well to the west of Bandar Abbas, a fleet of mosquito craft, consisting of some eight tugs and launches, armed with maxims, and a three-pounder in the bow, were added to the patrolling strength of the ships in the Gulf, and performed most useful service. These were "mothered" by another R.I.M. ship, the *Minto*, which was a small up-to-date trooper.

The next step was to arrange for timely information being conveyed to the patrolling ships of intended sailings by dhows loading up with arms on the Arabian coast, as also of their probable destinations on the Persian coast. By this means it was hoped that even if the ships at sea were eluded, the dhows might run into ships' cutters carefully concealed in creeks or inlets near the proposed landing-places. With the object of acquiring this information, and to keep in close touch with the Navy, arrangements were made

for stationing secret-service agents in and about Masqat, and along the Makran coast. It was their duty to supply news as gained to some one in authority either at Masqat, Jashk, or Chahbar, whence the information would be passed on at once to the Navy. In furtherance of these plans I was ordered from Simla to the Persian Gulf in November, 1909, with instructions to make my headquarters at Jashk. Here it was intended shortly to erect a wireless installation, by means of which I could communicate freely in cipher all information received to the ships patrolling at sea.

The Admiral, in a letter to the Government of India in November, had pointed out the futility of confining his operations to the sea alone; and strongly advocated the fitting out of a transport to carry a mixed force (the composition of which could subsequently be decided), which would enable him to make raids on those stores of arms and ammunition that were still within striking distance of the coast—pending the arrival of the Afghan caravans from the interior to remove them. To discuss this and other problems with the Admiral, in my new capacity as Naval Intelligence Officer, I was directed first to report to the Naval Commander-in-Chief at Bombay, and then to proceed to Karachi by mail steamer in time to catch the next fast Gulf mail leaving that port for Masqat.

The latter steamer was boarded also at Karachi

by two highly trained secret-service agents, whom I will designate as A. and B., and with whom I was very closely associated during the next few months. Both proved themselves men of great intelligence and resource, and rendered most valuable services in connection with the gun-running operations. A. was to be landed at Masqat, which would remain his special sphere of activity; whilst B. was to proceed to Bandar Abbas, and join me later at Jashk by the next down-mail calling at that place. It is perhaps unnecessary for me to add that, to all outward appearances, these men were complete strangers to me during the time we travelled together between Karachi and Masqat.

There are probably but few who have not been impressed when obtaining their first view, at dawn, of the barren nature of the boldly-serrated rocky mountains which arise abruptly out of the sea along the Arabian coast in the vicinity of Masqat. The approach to that port is so skilfully hidden that it is hard to believe there can be any passage through those forbidding cliffs to a peaceful harbour within their embrace. But as the steamer plies steadily up the coast, comparatively close inshore, a narrow opening is suddenly revealed; and, changing course, the ship glides in between threatening headlands—for all the world like the entrance to the "Pirates' Cove" of one's boyhood's imagination—and soon casts anchor in a

diminutive expanse of still water encircled by bare frowning heights. On these, conspicuous masonry watch-towers catch the eye, perched at intervals high up on the hillsides, thereby increasing the resemblance to a haunt of the blood-thirsty buccaneer of romance. But a sense of security is restored when one observes that the steep slopes are emblazoned in many places with formidable capitals, spelling out the names of numerous ships of the British Navy, which for generations past have put in a tour of service in the Gulf. This fact has been commemorated by their enterprising bluejackets scaling giddy inclines, and inscribing the titles of their ocean homes in prominent positions on the everlasting rocks which for a time afforded them an asylum within this tranquil basin.

The small town of Masqat extends to the water's edge at the end of the harbour, and is built on a narrow strip of relatively level ground, bounded closely by the same desolate hills rising behind it. Like all Arab towns, the streets are confined and crooked, little more than alleys in appearance, and thronged with a heterogeneous mixture of nationalities, including Arabs, Indians, Parsees, Baluchis, Persians, and other Oriental races as remote as Swahilis from Zanzibar and Mombasa.

The town has but a small sea-front, and the local coast-trade by dhows employed in the arms traffic,

and other legitimate trade pursuits, was chiefly to and from the small port of Matrah, a few miles farther up the coast. It was the land-locked harbour of Masqat, however, that all naval ships and mail steamers entered; for here were not only the various European consulates, and the Sultan himself, located, but the sole coaling station to be found on the Persian and Arabian coasts of the Gulf was there established; and it is, moreover, connected with India and the Gulf ports by submarine cable.

On entering Masqat harbour we observed that the *Fox* had already arrived to replenish her coal supply, and a launch from her soon came alongside to take off their mails and convey me to the cruiser. She lay in harbour all day, and crept silently out of Masqat after dusk for Jashk. The sea was calm, so we sighted our destination next day towards noon, and dropped anchor about three-quarters of a mile from the shore in the open roadstead. Our arrival was unexpected, and I and my Indian servant, and our belongings, were taken ashore in the ship's galley and bum-boat, and dumped on the beach close to the barracks, occupied by a detachment of the 117th Mahrattas, detailed for the protection of the Telegraph station. The *Fox* sailed again soon after I was landed, and proceeded west to pick up some of her boats, which had been out "on their own" for the past ten

days or so, and were probably running short of fresh water by now.

My first impressions of my future home for the next few months were not exactly exhilarating. Around me was a howling wilderness of sand, almost as flat as the palm of one's hand. The Telegraph station was situated on a long narrow spit bounded on three sides by the sea ; and looking north, across the intervening bay, to the bare, rugged, red-and-brown rocks of the Bashakard foot-hills, some six to eight miles distant, did not add to the beauties of the prospect by which I was confronted. I had little leisure at the moment, however, to pursue this train of thought, as my immediate desire was to get my belongings removed to the shelter of the Telegraph buildings ; so I hunted up the Indian officer of the detachment, and asked him to turn out a fatigue party of his men for the purpose. The buildings were 300 to 400 yards distant from the infantry lines, and I was provided by the Indo-European Telegraph Department official in charge with excellent high, roomy quarters in one of the main blocks next the office. In fact, I was in clover.

Owing to the possibility of the Afghans attacking Jashk and Chahbar telegraph stations, as a reprisal for captures of arms intended for them, and because the Indian authorities were placing serious difficulties in the way of Afghans reaching Masqat

for their purchase, it had been early decided that the usual hot-weather infantry guards at both places should be increased for the cold season, and the two stations placed in a state of defence by the construction of earth-works and barbed-wire entanglements. This task was accordingly pushed on with energy immediately after my arrival at Jashk; and the installation of the wireless taken in hand by a party dispatched from India for the purpose.

The *raison d'être* of the gun-running operations, and the methods of dealing with the evil, having been now explained, the following tales may serve to show what we were up against in our endeavours to checkmate the wiles of the Afghans and their accomplices.

THE TALE OF A TREASURED CARGO

I

The S.S. *Gulistan* had entered the small landlocked harbour of Masqat early one January morning. Her cranes were already busy transferring numbers of heavy packing-cases and an assorted cargo from her holds to two or three large dhows alongside. On the beach, gangs of Arabs and other coolies were assembled to unload the dhows as they arrived, and to pass the goods through the Customs of His Highness the Sultan of Masqat.

Ali Khan, an Afghan merchant who had specialized for some years past in firearms, had risen from small beginnings to become a man of considerable wealth in this remote spot. He was well known to firms of some repute in Europe, who had always found him prompt in his settlement of their accounts for goods supplied. It is true that the goods he imported from Europe were only of one class, consisting of rifles, pistols, and ammunition for the various types of weapons which were openly exhibited for sale in his

shop in a tortuous street of the town. The sight of these modern breech-loading firearms of precision filled the heart of many an Arab and Afghan, Baluch and Persian with a longing desire for possession; and thus the shop of Ali Khan was a favourite resort of such visitors, who regarded a good rifle as of little less value than their lives. And here these aspirants for possession would lovingly toy with the divers patterns displayed, and have the mechanism explained to them by Ali Khan and his persuasive assistants.

Ali Khan was expecting an important consignment of modern arms per S.S. *Gulistan*, running to some fifty packing-cases of rifles, and half as many of ammunition. Delivery taken, and the necessary dues paid to the Customs officials, the cases were removed to his shop by his Arab myrmidons. Now he had lately been in communication with one Sher Mahommed, a resident of Kabul, who, during the last few years, had been a very regular visitor to Masqat in the cold weather. Like Ali Khan he, too, was out for large profits and quick returns by embarking on what had hitherto proved a most lucrative trade—the trade in arms, for which there was practically an unlimited demand from his compatriots and the Pathans of the N.W. Frontier of India.

Sher Mahommed was generally recognized by

his Afghan friends as a leader of courage and ingenuity; and he was credited with an organizing ability well above that of other traders who travelled with merchandise between Afghanistan and the markets on the Persian coast. Large caravans now yearly set forth from Afghanistan under his guidance, towards the close of the summer months, laden with goods from that country and central Asia, for which profitable markets could be found at Kirman, Bandar Abbas, and other important towns in Persian Baluchistan. But being a connoisseur in firearms, he had made them his main merchandise on the homeward journey for some years past. From Masqat on the Arabian side the goods were transported in dhows across the Persian Gulf to various points along the opposite coast, and thence on camels to distant Kabul, Herat, and other promising centres.

So far this season Sher Mahommed's legitimate trading operations had met with considerable success. On arrival at Bandar Abbas, however, he was not a little perturbed to learn that the British authorities had taken stringent measures to combat the traffic in arms from Masqat. He had counted on greatly increasing the exceptional profits of this year's venture by a big purchase from Ali Khan. It was most disconcerting, therefore, to hear of dhows captured at sea with

their cargoes of arms for the Persian coast, and permits to visit Masqat refused to Afghans. Still, he was not a man to be lightly turned aside from any project on which he had set his heart—particularly when a fortune awaited him if he could only surmount the immediate dangers. He knew every mile of the Persian coast from Gwatar in the East to Minab on the West; there was scarce a creek or suitable landing-place along that 350 miles of country but was familiar to him. Despite the opposition of the British, therefore, he was prepared to take the risk and trusted in his ingenuity to out-wit the blockading ships.

In order to conceal his movements, for he was well known to many in Bandar Abbas, Sher Mahommed soon left that place with his caravan of 50 men and 200 camels. Ostensibly he had abandoned all idea of proceeding to Masqat, and gave out that he was bound for Bashakard and Geh to do more trade on his way homewards. Passing through Minab he found ideal camping-grounds, and good grazing for his animals, amid the outlying hills and valleys about Sarzeh. His next move was to get in touch with an old Pathan broker, Haji Nasir by name, who lived at Sekui, a village near the coast, some miles from Sarzeh. This man had often provided shelter for Afghans, and now supplied them with skilful disguises which would reduce chances of detection should

a patrolling ship overhaul them on their passage to the Arabian coast. Nasir also arranged for a dhow with a local *nakhuda*, or skipper, to transport Sher Mahommed to Limah on the Oman shores, some 200 miles north-west of Masqat.

This passage of 50 miles or so was accomplished during a long January night, and before daylight Sher Mahommed and six of his Afghan retainers were safely landed. There it was easy to charter another sailing-craft, and coast along in territorial waters, secure against interference, till they reached Matrah, only a couple of miles distant from Masqat and the gun shops. Here Sher Mahommed and his men took up their quarters ready to arrange further action with the skippers of dhows, who frequented this port in preference to the apparently more closely watched harbour of Masqat.

So far Sher Mahommed's plans had worked out quite successfully. He was again in touch with his friend Ali Khan, and the comparative ease with which he had reached his destination, despite the vigilance of the patrolling ships and their cutters, filled him with high hopes as to the future. The consignment from the *Gulistan* fired his admiration. The only question was how many he could afford to buy of these up-to-date magazine rifles, Mausers and Mannlichers and all. Between old friends the bargain did not

take unduly long. The money was eventually handed over in thousand-rupee notes, and Sher Mahommed became the owner of 1,500 magazine rifles and 200,000 rounds of ammunition.

Another step in the direction of future opulence had been satisfactorily taken; but there still remained the most risky part of the venture—the transportation of this highly treasured cargo to the Persian littoral, where his camels and accomplices were awaiting it. Until he could perfect his plans for embarking on this stage of the enterprise the rifles and ammunition were left in charge of Ali Khan, in order to withdraw attention from himself.

Meanwhile fresh reports now began to arrive of further recent captures at sea. Three men-o'-war entered Masqat with hundreds of rifles heaped up on their decks—seized from various dhows that attempted to run the blockade. This caused much food for reflection. The sea-faring Arabs frequenting Matrah were well aware that the captured dhows had employed divers means of concealing the true nature of their valuable cargoes. As these stratagems had failed to deceive the British bluejackets, a feeling of despondency and hate spread among the native traders. Loud and deep were the curses hurled by the coastal population of Matrah against the British; and numerous were the petitions presented to H.H.

the Sultan of Masqat by the merchants and owners of the confiscated arms, who demanded compensation for the unparalleled losses inflicted on them by this apparently high-handed action of the British. The "Anglez" had always been regarded as their protectors against lawlessness at sea in the Gulf; whereas now their most valued possessions—rifles and ammunition—were being ruthlessly taken from them by their ancient friends. The alarmed potentate consequently found himself in a most perplexing dilemma between the Devil and the Deep Sea—the former represented by his infuriated and excited subjects, and the latter by Britain's power. The British had long upheld the Sultan against Arab intrigues and attacks by pretenders from outside; and, as a matter of policy, His Highness could not now lightly cast them aside, nor even afford to offend them. Hence the net result was no tangible relaxation of the blockade.

Sher Mahommed became consumed with anxiety, therefore, as to the future; for he experienced great difficulty in persuading the better-known *nakhudas* to run the gauntlet of the patrolling ships. Before leaving his base at Sarzeh near the Persian coast, he had arranged that his purchases should be taken across by the shortest sea passage compatible with safety. With the naval patrol ships' boats constantly changing their

stations along the Persian coast, it was not easy to anticipate from one week to another what would be the most suitable landing-place. There must, consequently, be a considerable element of luck in the venture; and he had no intention of putting all his eggs in one basket. His idea now was to retrace the safe but circuitous route by which he had come, and finally, from distant Limah, remote from the spies who abounded near Masqat, send his valuable cargo those 50 miles across the narrowest part of the Gulf, in three equal consignments. Once across near Sirik or Ziarat, it should be fairly easy to remove the goods inland to his standing camp at Sarzeh.

At last, after endless discussions and promises of exceptionally high rewards, Sher Mahommed persuaded three Biaban *nakhudas* to undertake the risky enterprise. These three skippers, Rahim Dad, Guri and Saleh, were old hands at the game of running arms, and prided themselves on having, so far, always outwitted the forces arrayed against them. During the next three nights gangs of Arab coolies were employed, therefore, in transferring the rifles and ammunition to Matrah. Each night one dhow was loaded up and set sail before daylight up the coast towards Limah, the arms being concealed under bales of merchandise. In order to mislead inquisitive inquirers it was announced that Sher Mahommed

and his friends were bound for Koweit, at the head of the Persian Gulf, to fulfil an important contract made with a leading subject of the Sultan of that place.

With a favouring wind and little to disturb the equanimity of the three experienced skippers, as they hugged the coast within territorial limits, Limah was reached by all during the course of the next week. Plans for further action had been carefully considered in detail before leaving Matrah, and appliances for putting them into execution after arrival at Limah were already on board the three dhows. As a preliminary it was decided that Saleh should run across, practically empty, to Sirik and try to ascertain the present disposition of the patrolling ships' cutters; and to arrange with Sher Mahommed's men at Sarzeh the exact time and place for the landing of the first consignment. As soon as Saleh brought back the latest intelligence Rahim Dad was to make the first trip to the selected spot with one-third of the arms and ammunition.

Two days after his arrival at Limah, Saleh accordingly set forth on his mission with a message from Sher Mahommed to his head-man at Sarzeh. All arms and half his merchandise had been taken out of his dhow and left for the time being on the Arabian shore; and since there was nothing now of an incriminating nature on board he

sailed at daylight one morning early in February. Some way out he sighted one of the hated British cruisers patrolling a beat between Ras Masandam and Ziarat, on the Biaban coast. Feeling he had nothing to conceal Saleh held boldly on his course, well knowing his presence had probably already been noted, and that it would not be long before he received an imperative summons to "heave to," whilst his cargo was submitted to examination. When within hailing distance of the cruiser out ripped the inevitable order, and down came the dhow's sail in response. A cutter immediately put off from the cruiser with the boarding party to scrutinize the merchandise carried; and all being in correct order the dhow was allowed to proceed on her voyage after a short delay.

Saleh, now being furnished with a pass, resolved to make for Ziarat, some 30 miles south of Sirik, hoping that, by clinging to the shallow coast-line, he might be able to locate any ship's boats dotted along this area between the two places. He saw none, however; and it was only when he ran for the creek at the mouth of the Gaz river that he found a cutter there concealed, and on the look-out for possible landings in the vicinity. Here again his cargo was examined before he was free to have it removed to the village of Sirik. Leaving his crew on board in this sheltered

inlet, Saleh betook himself to Sirik ; and proceeded after dark to Sarzeh, where he interviewed Sher Mahommed's head-man. It was then decided that the first consignment should be landed at Girau, a few miles farther up the coast than Sirik, on the third night after the departure of Saleh for Limah.

During the return voyage—which was again made by Saleh in daylight, to disarm suspicion among the cutter's crew at Gaz—no untoward event occurred, and he was soon back at Limah with the latest news. Meanwhile, Rahim Dad and Guri had been busy by night in effecting some additions to the keels of their crafts ; and a careful observer might have noticed these two gentry and their crews in shallow water, hammering in stout iron dogs at close intervals below the water-line. The object of this procedure was not very obvious. The mystery deepened when the rearrangement of Rahim Dad's cargo was taken in hand ; for there appeared to be no intention on his part to conceal the rifles and ammunition carried. These were grouped along the entire length of the dhow, the bundles being placed on the top of the legitimate merchandise that filled the open well of the vessel.

Gul Baz, an Afghan and secret-service agent to the blockading force, temporarily located in this remote corner of the Oman peninsula, was

sore puzzled by this apparently confiding arrangement of so old and experienced a hand as Rahim Dad. It seemed as though that skipper were gambling on eluding the patrolling ships and their cutters during the hours of darkness, in order that the arms and ammunition might be advantageously placed for rapid unloading from the dhow the moment it reached its destination, and their removal inland before dawn. The ordinary cargo could then be ostentatiously discharged at leisure during the day. Still, Gul Baz was not entirely satisfied with this possible explanation of Rahim Dad's apparent lack of forethought; for what would happen should the dhow during its passage encounter a dead calm, or be overtaken by a sudden gale which prevented the opposite coast being reached before daylight? The dhow would probably be overhauled by a patrolling cruiser, and then good-bye to her costly cargo. No! there was more in this procedure of Rahim Dad's than met the eye. In any case, Gul Baz had surreptitiously acquired a good deal of information regarding Sher Mahommed's possessions and plans, and it was about time these were made known to the "Sahib" at Jashk. A dhow was leaving for that station on the Persian coast at dawn, with a cargo of goats and sheep, and he could book a passage in her.

The distance across was less than a hundred

miles ; and late the following night Gul Baz's information was in the hands of the Intelligence Officer at Jashk, and the wireless was crackling out its purport to the watchful ships at sea.

II

Rahim Dad had left Limah the previous night, and favoured by his usual good luck, combined with bold seamanship, he safely crossed the gulf and reached his destination at Girau in the small hours of the morning. In the darkness he had successfully eluded one of the patrolling cruisers on her beat, though he experienced some anxious moments when a searchlight threatened to reveal the presence of his dhow. Happily for him he was still outside the limit of the beam ; but it was scaring enough to cause him to lower his sail with a run, in order to escape detection. The cruiser then passed on her way ; and breathing freely again Rahim Dad rehoisted his sail and steered direct for Girau. A hurricane lantern signal ashore announced that all was well, and that the party of Afghans and camels were awaiting his arrival. He ran for a small inlet near by, and in a couple of hours all rifles and ammunition were got ashore, and loaded up on camels. The Afghans set off an hour or two before dawn for their camp in the hills near Sarzeh ; whilst Rahim Dad shifted the position of his dhow to a considerable distance

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from the spot where the arms had been landed, in order to be well clear of the incriminating foot-prints of camels, and other signs of activity where loading-up had taken place. He and his crew then turned in to sleep the sleep of the just until the sun was well above the horizon.

The rest of the day was spent in discharging the legitimate portion of his cargo. The dhow was visited by a ship's cutter, which issued out of the mouth of the Gaz river, some eight or ten miles to the south, when daylight showed her up. But since everything was apparently in good order, the transportation of the merchandise on donkeys and Baluchis to Girau was permitted. Before returning to Limah to report "all well," Rahim Dad arranged with the Afghans that Guri should run his consignment three days hence to the neighbourhood of Ziarat, some forty miles south of the landing now successfully made.

Needless to say, Rahim Dad met with an enthusiastic reception by Sher Mahommed on his arrival at Limah ; and all was made ready to start Guri off. When the eventful night arrived Guri slipped out of Limah after dark accompanied, as had been Rahim Dad, by two of the Afghans in disguise. Sher Mahommed and his two remaining companions were to sail with the third and last consignment under Saleh, as soon as Guri returned

and sent out his "all right" message. Now, Guri's destination was almost east of Limah, whereas Rahim Dad's course had been a north-easterly one, though of about the same distance. By comparing notes these two crafty skippers formed the opinion that if Guri held a somewhat southerly course for Ziarat he would probably avoid the beat on which the cruiser patrolling between Ras Masandam and Ziarat apparently steamed. And so Guri set forth on his enterprise with a stout heart and firm confidence in his ability to pull off in turn his coup.

When some 20 miles out on his dash, away in the north he faintly discerned the mast-head light of a ship steaming on a south-easterly course; but he had a fine breeze to help him, and his dhow was scudding merrily along at a steady 7 or 8 knots, so he felt no immediate uneasiness. He kept a close watch, however, on that potential danger signal, and edged away a bit farther south in case of accidents. When he judged he must be considerably to the south of his objective, and some two-thirds of the way across, he decided to change course to the north-east. Suddenly, out of the blackness of night to the south, another beam of light shot across the face of the sea, rested for a moment, which seemed an age, on his craft, and then passed on. But it quickly returned; and this time a marked pause followed,

sufficient to disclose the anxious face of the skipper and crew. The dhow was evidently located by a pursuing ship from the south; and the only question was whether to run for the shallow coastline, which might possibly be reached within a couple of hours if he were not overtaken, or to bluff the situation out. Guri decided to adopt the latter alternative, and to hold on his course as though he had nothing to conceal or to fear; but he must get rid of the incriminating cargo without delay.

All hands at once busily employed themselves in ruthlessly heaving overboard their priceless bundles of rifles and ammunition. The curious phenomenon was then observed that the speed of the dhow visibly lessened, despite this apparent lightening of the vessel by some tons of dead weight. Meantime the searchlight was playing fitfully on the suspect craft, and the cruiser was obviously rapidly overhauling her quarry; so all thought of escape was out of the question. An hour after the dhow had first been sighted the cruiser drew sufficiently near to megaphone the order to heave to—an order there was no refusing, so down came the dhow's sail. Soon the ship herself was close alongside, a boat lowered, and a boarding party dispatched to take possession until daylight admitted of further examination being carried out.

Thus, "rocked in the cradle of the deep," Guri and his associates formed an unhappy group under the watchful eyes of the bluejackets and the young naval officer in charge. At daylight the cargo was carefully overhauled, and nothing suspicious disclosed. Guri proved most helpful in every way, his crew willingly assisting in the task. In fact, everything was thoroughly sociable and pleasant, until the moment came when the young naval officer called out to several of his men to get aboard a stout hawser that lay coiled up at the bottom of the cutter. When Guri perceived this action he could not avoid the sensation that it boded no good, though he did not yet fathom what new-fangled idea was in the wind. The hawser was soon uncoiled, the two ends were seized by bluejackets on each side of the dhow, and the slack passed over the stern and dropped overboard. Guri felt a clutching at his heart as the bluejackets on each side began to take in the slack, and then started to haul the hawser along the keel from the stern towards the bow. They had not got very far with their task when they were brought up standing by some weighty obstructions, which caught the hawser below water a short distance clear of the rudder. The young naval officer shouted out the information through his megaphone to the Commander of the cruiser, which was standing by.

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A few minutes later out came the steam pinnace from the cruiser, several bluejackets in her being armed with stout boat-hooks. Guri now realized that the end had come, for these "simple, dull-witted, cheery sailors" had guessed his secret! The pinnace reached the side of the dhow, the long boat-hooks were thrust under water towards her keel, and the sailors soon hooked on to heavily weighted ropes. These were with some difficulty drawn to the surface. From their ends hung either a bundle of rifles or an ammunition box, done up in waterproof covers. The other ends of these ropes were secured to stout iron dogs fixed on the bottom of the dhow. So far as Guri and his merry men were concerned, the situation was impossible of satisfactory explanation. They were made prisoners, therefore, and transferred to the cruiser, whilst the good work continued. In all there were no less than fifty bundles of rifles and seventy boxes of ammunition thus sweetly suspended from the bottom of the dhow; which perhaps accounts for the dhow losing speed when these had been thrown overboard. Anyhow, a valuable capture had been made, and some prize money would be due for this night's patrol; so the only miserable folk amid the general jubilation were Guri and his accomplices. The rifles and ammunition were removed to the cruiser, and Guri's dhow—old friend of many a previous adventure—was

sent to the bottom before his saddened eyes. The cruiser then resumed her beat.

Several days passed, yet there was no sign or news of Guri at Ziarat, where the Afghans from Sarzeh were anxiously awaiting his advent. Sher Mahommed was equally in the dark, and daily expected to see Guri's dhow sail triumphantly into Limah Bay; but as day succeeded day, and a whole week elapsed without news, he could contain his impatience no longer. He decided, therefore, to send Rahim Dad over empty to Ziarat to institute inquiries. Rahim Dad accordingly slipped across one night, only to find the Afghans still waiting at Ziarat, and quite unable to vouchsafe any information. He coasted up as far north as Kuhistak, but news there was none; and when at last he left for Limah again he had learnt nothing, save that Guri had nowhere put in an appearance. He and his dhow and all aboard had completely vanished.

At this cruel news Sher Mahommed became gravely concerned. There could be little doubt but that Guri and his cargo had been intercepted by some patrolling ship. A few days later this supposition received indirect confirmation. The skipper of a coasting dhow from Matrah reported that a man-o'-war had entered Masqat, shortly before his departure, with numerous rifles and a party of prisoners on board. In all probability,

therefore, Guri had been removed from the scene for the remainder of the gun-running season.

There was no use in grieving further over the irremediable; but it was necessary to leave nothing undone to ensure the safe passage of the third and last consignment of arms. This, also, as provisionally arranged with the Afghans by Rahim Dad, was to be run to Ziarat. And for this final trip it was decided that both Rahim Dad and Saleh should set out together. Both dhows, therefore, stole out of Limah one night after dark, and bore each other close company until they had traversed half their journey; when again, in the distance to the north, the headlight of a cruiser was discerned. Shouting out his final injunctions to Saleh, Rahim Dad boldly changed his course to the north-east, whilst his accomplice headed with all speed direct for Ziarat. An hour later Rahim Dad was firmly in the toils of the cruiser, fuming and vehemently protesting against this unwarranted capture of an innocent craft. This outburst availed him little, for he was detained, whilst the cruiser stood by, until daylight, when his goods were examined. Nothing incriminating was found aboard amongst his merchandise. A hawser was then passed under his keel, without result. But the latter procedure rather opened Rahim Dad's eyes to the possible discovery made—when Guri presumably fell a

D

victim to its application—and he carefully noted this for future guidance.

He was then permitted to continue on his way, rejoicing; for he had successfully carried out his share of the programme, by acting as a decoy to attract the attention of any approaching cruiser during the passage, and detaining it until daylight. If Saleh had escaped detection, the rifles and ammunition he was carrying should now be well on their way to Sarzeh, and safe. He set sail for Ziarat, therefore, with few forebodings; and sure enough there was Saleh's dhow placidly unloading her cargo of merchandise. On beaching his vessel near by he quickly perceived that Sher Mahommed and his two Afghan confederates were not amongst the crowd; and as a ship's cutter was standing by with a Maxim trained on the throng, amid which several blue-jackets were conspicuous, he guessed that the birds had flown with their most treasured belongings. He was soon ashore, and greeted Saleh with a hearty hand-shake, as though they had not met for many days, and inquired loudly after his health and the nature of his cargo.

It was not until after dark, however, that the two hoary conspirators were able to "swap lies" at leisure in the seclusion of Rahim Dad's hut on shore. Rahim Dad's story has been related; and his friend Saleh's yarn corresponded closely

with his own previous experience, when he had eluded the cruiser and ran for Girau. Afghans and camels were waiting at Ziarat as arranged, so Sher Mahommed and his party had departed with the arms well before dawn—satisfied, though not entirely elated, with the result of this season's venture in the arms line.

III

On his arrival at Sarzeh, Sher Mahommed had, indeed, grounds for self-congratulation, since he had done better than most in getting two-thirds of his purchases at Masqat safely across to the Biaban coast. Henceforth the difficulties before him would be of a trivial nature. All that remained was to make arrangements for bringing up to his camp the merchandise temporarily left on the coast. But there was no immediate hurry, as the other caravans for Afghanistan, which he was to join, would not be assembling at the rendezvous for another fortnight. Moreover, Sarzeh was a pleasant resting-place compared with the desolate spots in which he had passed the best part of the last two months, and the deserts he had yet to traverse before reaching his home in distant Kabul.

Occasional mendicant *fakirs*, and other penniless travellers proceeding on apparently aimless journeys, as is their wont in Persian Baluchistan,

had from time to time received hospitality at this standing camp, and continued on their way refreshed. One such travel-stained beggar had reached Sarzeh some days after Sher Mahommed's return to his headquarters, and appealed for food and lodging for the night. This was readily accorded, for Sher Mahommed now felt at tolerable peace with mankind, and was by nature generous towards the poor and needy. On departing next morning the lonely wanderer followed down the course of the Gaz river towards the coast; and once out of sight of the camp became curiously engrossed by the scenery and his immediate surroundings. He carefully scrutinized all landmarks, and special topographical features, even following up side-tracks into the hills branching off from the main worn path leading to the village of Sirik from Sarzeh. His movements were leisurely, and he displayed an unusual interest, for one possessing so uncouth an exterior, in these rugged ridges and vales. On emerging once more on to the coastal plain his attitude resumed its former weary bearing; and he trudged listlessly across the sandy desert that intervened between the foot-hills and the village of Sirik. Here he sought shelter and food, and expressed the intention of resting for several days before continuing his tramp.

The day following the departure of his late

visitor, Sher Mahommed dispatched two parties of men and camels to Girau and Ziarat, to bring up the merchandise left at those two places. The *fakir* had warned him that the British were employing troops for raiding depots of arms from the sea, and stated that several captures had lately been effected in this manner along the Makran coast. The Biaban coast, however, had not hitherto been subjected to any such visitations; and, in any case, his store being some 12 miles from the sea should be sufficiently remote to be safe—particularly as it could only be approached over difficult broken country through the hills. At the same time it was well to be on the alert, for so frequently it was the unexpected that happened. Hence Sher Mahommed had instituted a system of sentries about the camp by night, and posted picquets on commanding positions by day at some distance out, and overlooking the valley of the Gaz. The main hindrance to a rapid evacuation of his position in the event of a surprise attack was that, during the long halt at Sarzeh, the camels had devoured all grazing within a short radius of the camp. They had, therefore, to be conducted to grounds some miles distant. Still, a week at most would see the last of this camp; for on the return of the Ziarat party he had decided he would trek farther inland for greater security.

Thus it fell out that whilst his available strength was reduced by the absentees at Girau and Ziarat, shortly before noon one day Sher Mahommed was startled in his tent by the sound of firing from one of his picquets overlooking the Gaz. Almost at the same moment one of the group located there dashed into the camp to report that a force of bluejackets and Indian troops were marching up the valley. The unexpected had happened; but Sher Mahommed had prepared his plans in advance for such a contingency. There were several strongly *sangared* positions between the valley of the Gaz and his camp on the plateau, detachments to hold which had previously been allotted, in the event of an attack. The intricacies of the terrain made it difficult to attack on an extended front; so a few stout-hearted men armed with magazine rifles, and no lack of ammunition, might hope to delay a greatly superior force for a considerable time.

Sher Mahommed's whole available strength, however, now numbered only thirty rifles, as ten men had accompanied the camels to their grazing grounds. A messenger was dispatched hot-foot to call them in with their animals; but their return could not be reckoned on for another hour at least. The remaining Afghans dashed off to occupy the selected positions covering the approach to the camp from the direction of the Gaz Valley.

Sher Mahommed himself proceeded at once to the picquet which had first given the alarm.

On reaching the spot he quickly discerned the grave nature of the situation. The leading enemy troops were lying extended across the narrow valley at a distance of some 1,000 to 1,200 yards, and concentrating their fire on two *sangars* which had evidently been accurately located. Farther back there appeared to be movements of troops up branch nullahs; whilst in the distance he observed agile mules clambering up steep hill slopes to a small plateau above the valley, whence a clear view of his defensible position seemed certain to be obtained. So far his men had suffered no casualties beyond slight abrasions and scratches from stone splinters; but presently a perfect hail of bullets passed over the *sangar*, followed by the ominous rat-a-tat of a machine gun. This was soon succeeded by a loud burst overhead, and a spraying of bullets on the ground not 100 yards behind the *sangar*, closely pursued by the distant boom of the dreaded *top*, or mountain gun.

Before long the range had been found, and two men wounded by shrapnel. Encouraging his men to hold out to the last, Sher Mahommed then made his way under cover to the *sangar* on an adjacent spur, to see how its occupants were faring. Here, too, he came under a hot fusillade;

for the infantry had advanced appreciably, and were directing a steady fire on both *sangars*, which were receiving attention likewise from machine and mountain guns. The holders of the second *sangar* had already lost two men killed and one wounded out of its puny garrison of six rifles ; and it was difficult to feel hopeful of an ultimate withdrawal of his treasures in camp.

The end was near at hand ; for some minutes later the *sangar* was assailed by fire from its left rear. His advanced position had been turned by troops creeping up an obscure nullah which led to the summit of the plateau on which the camp was situated. These troops had only to rush the sole remaining position in rear, and the camp was theirs. Signalling across to the occupants of the *sangar* he had first visited, Sher Mahommed indicated to them to double back under cover to camp. He and the three survivors of that in which he was sheltering darted off simultaneously by another route, along a gulley which led to within a short distance of the camp. It was a forlorn hope ; for by the time both parties reached the rear of the camp they could perceive no signs of the camels. The intermediate *sangars* had been outflanked, too, and a hurried *saute-qui-peut* of their defenders was in progress. All was now lost. The victorious troops were

advancing rapidly on the camp, and nothing intervened between them and their objective. Cursing the British from the depths of their hearts, Sher Mahommed and his men continued their flight until they met the camels and their guards some distance beyond the camp. These were hastily turned back and driven off in the opposite direction; and the survivors of the struggle, now united, but reduced to a bare half of their morning strength, only cried a halt when the grazing grounds had again been reached and they felt secure from further pursuit.

The sound of loud explosions from the direction of the camp subsequently announced that the work of destruction was in hand; and the bitterness of defeat was accentuated by the feeling that all on which so much had been risked during the past two months would be totally destroyed in no more than two short hours. Whilst daylight lasted it was little use attempting to approach again the scene of the mid-day conflict; but perhaps before nightfall the force would withdraw, and it might yet be possible to salvage something from the wreckage. It was a vain anticipation; for scouts proceeding stealthily towards the camp after dark observed numbers of small camp fires, in addition to the glow of late conflagrations, and rightly surmised the force was bivouacked there for the night, with picquets posted round the

camp. The sight was sufficient to cause the gun-runners to boil over with rage, and they vented their spleen by firing a number of rounds from long ranges into "the brown" of the hostile camp.

At dawn the force was preparing to withdraw ; and an hour later the camp had been evacuated, and a strong rear-guard was marching off. The Afghans were soon back in their ravaged camp, and had the mortification of seeing the ground strewn with bent barrels of rifles, broken and charred butts, and bolts hideously smashed up ; whilst deep craters some little distance outside the camp denoted where dumps of ammunition had been formed and ruthlessly blown up with dynamite. Then, indeed, did the iron enter into their souls ; and they followed up the retiring force and subjected the rear-guard to a running fire until it was clear of the hills, when these guerilla tactics ceased. But it was a mere explosion of wrath, for few, if any, casualties were inflicted on the steady and well-trained troops who had so recently discomfited them.

And yet that force had by no means passed unscathed through the operations of the previous day ; and could Sher Mahommed have wafted his being to the beach, where re-embarkation was taking place to a large cruiser and transport standing well out from the shore, he would have

noticed something gratifying to his spirit of revenge. For amid that throng he would have witnessed three lifeless bodies being carried with all reverence to a ship's boat for interment at sea ; whilst sitting, or lying on stretchers, awaiting their turn to be transferred to the ships, were ten or a dozen other bandaged figures, who had received gun-shot wounds during their adventure. Some were cheery, others obviously in great pain ; and amongst the former Sher Mahommed might conceivably have recognized one who had partaken of his hospitality quite recently. But this smart young Pathan N.C.O., with broken arm in splints and sling, being congratulated by the commander of the force for the part he had gallantly played as guide, no longer had the appearance of a penniless *fakir*. Local inhabitants relate how a *fakir* residing with them for a few days was so alarmed when he heard of the midnight disembarkation taking place at Sirik that he hastily disappeared into the darkness—never to return. It seems possible, therefore, that uniform and equipment for him may have been landed with the force.

There is little left to add. Sher Mahommed's treasured cargo was no more. The small amount of merchandise due from Girau and Ziarat alone represented the result of weary months of trekking ; and weeks of anxiety since the arrival of the

caravan at Bandar Abbas. It was a forlorn and disconsolate party which set forth once more for Afghanistan. In place of the comparative affluence all had hoped to enjoy on their return, stark ruin now stared them in the face.

“WHEN DOG EATS DOG”

One often hears the expression, and yet how rarely do dwellers in Europe and the Western Hemisphere witness the literal eating of dog by dog! It is not a common sight even in the East, and I can only recall one definite occasion, during many years of service out there, when I happened on such a cannibalistic feast. It was soon after the capture of Baghdad by the British forces in Mesopotamia, in 1917, that I paid my first visit to Babylon, accompanied by two officers of my staff. After motoring through the shapeless remains of the once imposing enceinte of the famous city, we eventually drew near to the Rest House and Museum, abandoned not long before by the German archæologists. Hereabouts we noticed a fierce encounter taking place between a large white pi-dog and several equally stalwart members of his race. The white dog was evidently an intruder in the demesne of the other half-starved scavengers and was being very badly mauled. We thought little more about it, as dog-fights are frequent in Iraq, and

a turn in the track landed us at the Rest House on the bank of the Euphrates.

Here, "by the waters of Babylon," we sat down under shady trees and consumed the light repast we had brought with us from Baghdad. Thus refreshed, we set out to examine the stupendous excavations made by the Germans in the adjacent mounds, which laid bare many of the wonders of ancient Babylon. Retracing our footsteps a few yards from the Rest House, we came upon the complete skeleton of a large dog, the bones of which had been freshly picked clean, and still retained their gory tint. Near by, dozing in satiated contentment in the sun, were the four or five other dogs we had previously seen attacking the white dog. The skeleton before us was undoubtedly his, but the rest of the wretched creature, hair, skin, and flesh, had been entirely devoured by his voracious assailants. Half an hour before the intruder had been fighting for his life, and the only outward and visible sign of him now was his red-hued skeleton. It was a nauseating reflection.

This unpleasant illustration of an old saw nevertheless brought vividly to my mind the ready reply of a native of Persian Baluchistan with whom I had had some dealings in the Gulf a few years before the Great War. Rahim Dad, the gentleman in question, was a notorious gun-

running skipper of a dhow. Short and sturdy of build, “bearded like the pard,” and possessing aquiline features and eyes as piercing as those of a hawk, his whole being exuded a devil-may-care atmosphere well in keeping with his reputation for courage and resource. We had indulged in a good many conflicts of wit during the gun-running operations of that season, and honours were about easy. He had certainly succeeded several times in eluding the watchful cruisers at sea, and landing his valuable cargoes of arms and ammunition on Persian soil from the neighbourhood of Masqat, on the Arabian coast; but his good intentions on many other occasions had been frustrated by timely information reaching me. Being a particularly wily old bird, Rahim Dad had never been intercepted in the open sea with incriminating cargo in his dhow. On the rare occasions when he did fall into the clutches of a patrolling ship, nothing of a suspicious nature had been disclosed by an examination of the contents of his craft. It was common *gup*, however, all along the Persian coast, where every chieftain and underling was deeply steeped in the arms traffic, that Rahim Dad was the *nakhuda* (skipper) *par excellence* to be entrusted with the tricky undertaking of running arms across from the gun shops on the other side.

In “The Tale of a Treasured Cargo” an

account has been given of the part played by Rahim Dad in connection with the gun-running operations of an Afghan, Sher Mahommed by name. Thanks largely to the skill and ingenuity of this *nakhuda*, Sher Mahommed had successfully transferred in the dhows of Rahim Dad and a brother skipper two-thirds of the arms and ammunition purchased by him at Masqat to the Biaban coast of Persia. The subsequent fate of these arms was of little concern to Rahim Dad, who had received good payment in advance for the risks involved in the sea passage, and the landing of arms on the other side. His reputation had undoubtedly been enhanced by his enterprise whilst in the employ of Sher Mahommed; but he was too crafty a customer to rely on former methods for future gains, more especially as he had learnt that the naval authorities were alive to some of the tricks of his trade.

Rahim Dad, in fact, appeared content for some time afterwards to rest on his laurels. He laid up his dhow, and devoted himself almost exclusively to legitimate trade. Although evidence of complicity in the arms traffic against him was strong, yet no absolute proof was forthcoming in a country where few men are truthful. Hence, he now openly travelled backwards and forwards by mail steamer between Masqat and

Jashk, bearing in his train quantities of flour, dates, kerosene oil, and other commodities required by the villagers of Persian Baluchistan. At Jashk there was a Persian custom-house, and all goods landed at that small port were supposed to undergo examination by the Persian officials in charge.

Jashk is also an important Indo-European telegraph and cable station, which served as my headquarters for some months during this particular gun-running season. A wireless installation, erected for the purpose, enabled me to communicate all information received from various secret-service agents, scattered along the Persian and Arabian coasts, to the blockading ships at sea. It will be observed, therefore, that Rahim Dad had not recoiled from bearding the lion in his den, if I may venture so to describe myself. This sudden change in Rahim Dad's mode of life was not altogether lost upon one; and though it was hoped that he had found gun-running to be too dangerous a game to pursue, yet it was difficult to persuade oneself that the Ethiopian had completely changed his skin. At the same time one had to tread warily as the custom-house officials were Persians operating on Persian soil, and Rahim Dad was himself a Persian subject.

It was not long before reports began to reach me that rifles, Mauser pistols, and ammunition

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were still dribbling in at Old Jashk—some six miles distant round the bay from the small port of New Jashk—and were there taken over by Afghans awaiting their advent. It was scarcely surprising to learn that these consignments usually synchronized with the arrival of the fortnightly mail steamer from Masqat; so there was dirty work going on somewhere. It now became doubtful if the conversion of Rahim Dad to a plain merchant trader—the rôle in which he was now posing—was altogether genuine. Much correspondence ensued, however, with Teheran and elsewhere before permission was finally granted by the Belgian customs officials in Persia for a British officer at Jashk to attend all custom-house examinations there.

Then the fat was in the fire, and we soon had Rahim Dad by the heels; for not a few of the sacks of flour or grain and bales of cloth brought over by him from Masqat in the hold of the mail steamer contained either portions of a rifle or packets of ammunition. Baskets of dates, when subjected to closer scrutiny, revealed Mauser pistols, carefully concealed in the midst of the fruit of a basket here and there. Appetite comes with eating, so even Rahim Dad's innocent-looking tins of kerosene oil were viewed with suspicion. Not without reason, for the crafty rogue had introduced Mauser pistols into a number of

these also, and had the tins cunningly soldered up again after.

We now had all the evidence required to prove Rahim Dad's complicity in gun-running, despite his fervid protestations that the goods had been purchased by him in the ordinary way at Masqat, and that he was entirely ignorant that they contained anything but what they purported to. He averred that some foul enemy must have wrought this iniquity upon him in order to get him into trouble; and that he would never rest satisfied until he had had that man's blood. It was a fine display of righteous indignation, but left us cold; so Rahim Dad was marched off as a prisoner under sepoy escort to the infantry barracks in the telegraph station enclave near by.

Now one had acquired a sneaking regard, in a way, for this valiant old rascal, who was ever prepared to embark on risky enterprises to add to his ill-gotten gains. Though the lure of the rupee loomed large in the philosophy of these gun-running *nakhudas* of Persian Baluchistan, one could not withhold admiration for the skill, courage, and ingenuity they displayed in their attempts to outwit the forces against them. The pity of it was that all these commendable attributes had been directed into channels in conflict with the objects we had in view. Rahim Dad's trusty dhow had meanwhile been reposing in

the odour of sanctity in some obscure creek not far from his home at Ziarat. One had no just cause for depriving him of it by reason of the sins of which he was now adjudged guilty. Nevertheless, there seemed a possibility of enabling Rahim Dad to obtain pardon for past offences by working out his salvation in our interests by means of his fleet craft. The game was at all events worth trying.

Thus it came about that secret conversations were arranged at dead of night between Rahim Dad, my chief agent, and myself in the sandy wastes surrounding the telegraph station. A free pardon, and liberal payment in addition, were held out as baits to the covetous ruffian, should he faithfully perform some service helpful to our aims. The method of carrying out certain proposals made to him was left to his instinct; but failing an honest endeavour on his part to retrieve earlier misdeeds perpetrated by him, his dhow and all its contents were to be sent to the bottom of the sea and his home burnt. The matter being apparently satisfactorily settled, steps were taken for the release of Rahim Dad, who departed vowing gratitude for the chance given him of proving henceforth his loyalty to the British in the suppression of the arms traffic. Could he be trusted?

It was not altogether strange, perhaps, that

some time later I heard by cable from one of my agents at Masqat that Rahim Dad was up to his old tricks again. According to this cipher message, Rahim Dad had covertly, but nevertheless barefacedly, entered into a contract with Afghans to run a cargo of 500 rifles and 100,000 rounds of ammunition from some point along the Oman Peninsula to the Biaban coast opposite. To hide his real intentions, however, the sly dog was openly loading up his dhow with great baulks of timber, which he said were destined for the construction of a large house by a local chieftain near Ziarat. My feelings were naturally somewhat mixed at receipt of this intelligence; but at the back of my mind I continued to hope for the best. Anyhow, the patrolling cruisers were warned to be on the look-out for Rahim Dad in the vicinity of Ziarat; and it was suggested that, if intercepted, he and his dhow should be towed into Jashk in order to give me an opportunity for dealing with the case.

A few days later Masqat reported that Rahim Dad had left Matrah with his dhow, coasting northwards within territorial waters. A week passed without any further news of our friend. Then came a wireless from one of the cruisers, “Collared Rahim Dad early this morning. Keel-hauled dhow, and examined cargo. Latter timber only: no rifles or ammunition aboard. Appar-

ently good deal of cargo cast away to lighten dhow during pursuit, as sea calm and baulks passed at short intervals. Two Afghan passengers amongst crew. Will arrive Jashk this afternoon with whole outfit."

The cruiser arrived at the time stated, and Rahim Dad and his crew were brought ashore as prisoners, and handed over to the sepoy guard for safe custody, The Afghans captured were retained aboard the cruiser for transfer under escort to India from Masqat by the next convenient steamer from that port. But before the cruiser left to resume her beat, I had an illuminating conversation with Rahim Dad.

When brought before me he appeared to be in a state of deep dejection. The escort were ordered to withdraw whilst I investigated the case with my chief agent. No sooner had the door closed behind them than the attitude of the arch offender underwent a complete change. His countenance radiated the joy of victory, and he stepped forward with outstretched arms towards me. Before I realized his intention he was wringing my hand with enthusiasm, and gleefully claimed a reward of Rs.1,200 for his services! As I had been working myself up to let the rogue know what I thought about him, this rather took the wind out of my sails. "Twelve hundred rupees, you ruffian? More like twelve months in jail," was

my damping reply to his demand. “Where are the 500 rifles and 100 boxes of ammunition you set sail with from Matrah more than a week ago?” That, I thought, would stump him, as showing that my information regarding his movements and cargo was fairly precise.

But the old sea-dog only chuckled, and was obviously enjoying himself in having thus mystified us. It would take long, however, to give a detailed account of his adventures and actions since we parted company at our last interview, so I will just relate briefly on what grounds he based his claim of Rs.1,200.

On departing from Jashk, Rahim Dad stated, he returned by land to Ziarat, and there fitted out his dhow again with the crew who had faithfully served him in the past. He then sailed for Matrah, judging that his reputation would easily enable him to come to terms with Afghans purchasing arms at Masqat. He soon secured employment by agreeing to run a consignment of these illicit goods to a selected spot on the other side. His prowess whilst associated with Sher Mahommed being a topic of frequent conversation amongst the Arab population of those parts, Rahim Dad managed to squeeze Rs.1,500 out of the Afghans for the risks involved in this fresh enterprise. Payment was, of course, demanded in advance, and the sum lodged in a local bank ; whilst

the dhow was ostentatiously loaded up with timber in fulfilment of a commission received by him before he left Ziarat.

The arms and ammunition were then taken aboard at dead of night, together with two of the Afghans concerned, and the dhow left Matrah before daylight revealed her absence. Rahim Dad decided to avoid Limah this trip; and explained to the Afghans that by making a dart across from Khor Fakkan, farther south, he thought he stood a better chance of eluding cruisers patrolling between Ras Masandam and Ziarat. Whilst sailing comfortably within the three-mile limit up the coast all hands aboard busily perfected their plans for the final dash from Khor Fakkan across the narrow sea. This entailed a good deal of hammering and shifting of timber during the next few days, but by the time the dhow reached her destination, arms and ammunition were carefully stowed away, and an innocent cargo of timber was alone disclosed to inquisitive eyes. Meanwhile, other Afghans, carefully disguised, had proceeded by dhow, laden with merchandise, direct from Matrah to Ziarat. Their rôle was to make all necessary preparations for removing the arms as soon as safely landed at the pre-arranged spot and time. Rahim Dad thus left nothing to chance, and thereby gained the complete confidence of his Afghan employers.

All being now in readiness, Rahim Dad slipped out of Khor Fakkan under the cover of darkness, and steered a north-easterly course in a steady breeze and quiet sea. The crossing before him was something like seventy miles, and he assured the Afghans that, if favourable conditions prevailed throughout, Ziarat would be reached several hours before daylight. For long things went well, and the hopes of all ran high; but during the later watches of the night the wind betrayed signs of dying away. Some time before Rahim Dad had eluded, by a skilful manœuvre, the vigilance of a patrolling cruiser in the darkness. To be menaced by an impending calm now, therefore, when almost within measure of success, was too cruel a blow to be borne unmoved by Afghans and crew. Slowly, and yet more slowly, however, did the gallant dhow cleave the rapidly-growing-glassy surface of the sea; and when the first faint streaks of dawn heralded the birth of another day, there before them, on the pencilled horizon, still lay their goal.

It must certainly have been maddening to those aboard that uncontrollable circumstances should thus threaten to stifle the risky project when so near completion. Every device known to the experienced skipper was apparently utilized to seek advantage from any stray puff that stirred the surface of the deep. But progress was des-

perately slow, and the apparition presently of an approaching cruiser in the dim distance formed the climax to Rahim Dad's dilemma. Redoubled efforts were made to get a move on the heavily laden craft by lightening her cargo. Great baulks of timber were heaved overboard; but still the dhow made little headway towards the friendly shore. Meanwhile, the cruiser was fast overhauling the sorely crippled craft, and an hour later all hope of escape had vanished.

When the dhow was boarded Rahim Dad's name was taken. A most rigid examination of his ship and cargo by bluejackets followed, and the now usual hawser passed along under her keel. Not the sign of a rifle or ammunition was forthcoming. Here my narrator chortled with satisfaction. The disguise of the two Afghans on board was, however, penetrated, and they were removed as prisoners to the cruiser—a sigh of relief from Rahim Dad. The dhow with her crew under guard was then made fast to the side of the “marn-i-war,” which steamed off to Jashk.

Having vouchsafed so much information, Rahim Dad again repeated his demand for Rs.1,200 as his share of the proceedings. “Not so fast, old budmash,” replied I. “You were to get two rupees for every rifle, and two rupees for every box of ammunition that fell into our clutches as the result of your low cunning. You have handed

over nothing to us. On the contrary, you appear to have simply thrown overboard all the arms you carried from Khor Fakkan. It was scarcely your fault, too, that you were captured. But for the wind dropping, the Afghans would have got clean away with their rifles and ammunition.”

“Never!” snorted the old rogue. “*I* knew when we left Khor Fakkan that the breeze would not last, and that we should not reach Ziarat before daylight. Would I have dodged the ‘marn-i-war’ last night, otherwise? Sahib, these Afghans are a very distrustful people, and I would have a dagger in my throat if they ever suspected me of treachery. But I had other tricks ready, sahib, plenty more, not to reach the shore. Now let the sahib order all the timber floating off Ziarat to be gathered in quickly and pay me when this has been done.”

And so the cruiser’s commander was asked to salve these derelicts, for I now had an inkling of what the old boy was driving at.

It seemed, then, that my confidence in Rahim Dad’s integrity had not been misplaced; but pending further reports he was removed to rejoin his crew in the guard-room, whilst the cruiser set forth on her mission. The result was entirely satisfactory; for suspended from each half-submerged baulk of timber retrieved at sea were either fifty rifles or four boxes of ammunition. Thus

naval ratings got their prize-money for seizure of arms and ammunition on the high seas, and Rahim Dad received a bonus not far short of the amount he claimed. A few baulks only were never recovered, so the best part of 500 modern magazine rifles, and 100 boxes of ammunition for these, were captured through the aid of our new ally. It would be of interest to learn what the feelings of the Afghan prisoners on board the cruiser were, as silent witnesses of these salvage operations.

When Rahmin Dad was in due course informed of the outcome of the salvage operations, he betrayed little surprise or emotion. He had divulged his secret alliance with us to no single member of his crew, for he knew full well the attendant dangers of so doing. Accordingly, on receipt of the few rupee notes of high value handed over to him, he asked permission to fetch into my room the shoes he had left outside on entering. With two or three deft strokes of his sharp knife the soles were parted, the notes inserted between, and the shoes quickly stitched up again with a stout needle and thread.

Rahim Dad then rose to take his departure, whereupon I remarked something to the effect that he was not likely to starve if all his ventures proved as lucrative as his last. Looking at me with a humorous twinkle in his weather-beaten

old face, he promptly retorted, “When dog eats dog, sahib, there’s no need to starve.” As his broad back disappeared behind the door I was left wondering whether we or the Afghans were the consumed dog he had in mind. I am still wondering.

AN ALFRESCO NAUTCH

Rahim Dad had delved deeply into the pockets of Afghans and British alike by his latest enterprise in gun-running. But he had yet to justify his position in the eyes of his crew, and those Afghans who were still waiting the consignment of arms carried by him from Matrah.

This had not been overlooked in the interviews which had taken place between Rahim Dad and myself during the time he was confined with his crew in the guard-room at Jashk, pending the result of salvage operations by the cruiser. By arrangement with the commander before he steamed off, the derelict baulks were to be retained on board with their conjectured attachments. Rahim Dad's dhow was to remain, meanwhile, beached at Jashk to enable me to decide as to its disposal, when I received the commander's report by wireless. If rifles and ammunition were forthcoming in reasonable numbers, the commander was to convey them direct to Masqat, where they would be handed over, and the two Afghans dispatched as prisoners to Karachi. They would

thus be in jail for the rest of the season, and unable to communicate with their comrades on the Biaban coast.

When Rahim Dad left my presence after receiving his reward, he was escorted back to the guard-room. Here he was able to inform his crew that, as no arms had been found in his dhow, they were free to depart for Ziarat.

This intelligence surprised them greatly, but they attributed their good fortune to the subtlety of their skipper, who had completely hoodwinked the authorities as usual. To show that they bore me no ill-will, so Rahim Dad said, he and his merry men came to wish me good-bye, and thanked me for my hospitality during their stay at Jashk! They had certainly been fed at Government expense, but I suspect this heaping of coals of fire on my head was due to the humour innate in their leader. He was wearing a new pair of shoes, by the way; so I rather fancy his old ones, between the soles of which his rupee notes were *sûr*ely sewn, were safely stowed away in his locker on board the dhow.

The subsequent proceedings of Rahim Dad, for a time, did not greatly concern the operations in hand for the suppression of the arms traffic. But, as I was fully aware that he would have to exercise considerable ingenuity in re-establishing himself in the good graces of the Afghans, I was interested to

learn how matters had been explained when next we met. Rahim Dad's story was, to the best of my recollection, somewhat as follows.

The first thing to be done was, obviously, to get into touch again with the Afghans who were still probably hanging about Ziarat. The dhow had a good deal of timber yet in her hold, as that thrown overboard during the pursuit amounted only to some thirty-five baulks, and she had set sail from Khor Fakkan with about three times that quantity. There was a considerable sum of money, therefore, to be collected from the chief at Ziarat when he took delivery of what the dhow still contained; and that was no small matter in Rahim Dad's eyes.

The calm of the last few days had now been dissipated by a pleasant easterly breeze, so Rahim Dad had little difficulty in reaching Ziarat before dark the same day.

The half-dozen Afghans who had impatiently awaited the advent of his dhow eagerly gathered round when it was beached, and immediately inquired after the fate of their arms.

Rahim Dad was ostensibly thunderstruck to learn that they had not yet been recovered from the sea. Surely they must have seen him, a few mornings before, hopelessly becalmed off Ziarat, and captured by a cruiser! Why did they not at once retrieve the timber when the cruiser had

disappeared with the dhow in tow ? The Afghans admitted they had seen a dhow seized on the horizon ; but how were they to know it was his ? In any case, how could they get out to the scene of the capture in a dead calm ?

“ True,” commented Rahim Dad bitterly, “ in some ways you are a wise and thoughtful people ; but your brains do not work their best by the sea, if you have sat here and done nothing these last three days. Why did you not summon my friend, *nakhuda* Salih, to help you when we did not appear at the appointed time ? He lives close by. As for me and my men, those accursed Anglez have kept us locked up at Jashk, without food or drink, since we fell into their hands ; and your two friends were taken away in the ‘ marn-i-war ’—Allah knows where to ! Only after some days, when the sahib at Jashk became sure that we had carried naught but wood, did he release us. We have now hurried to you that we might learn the rifles and ammunition have been gathered in by you from the sea. But, alas ! this is not so, and my heart is sore within me.”

A few crocodile tears were suitably shed here, apparently, whilst the remainder of his crew genuinely anathematized the British—not on account of their ill-treatment, but because they were deprived of their share of the “ swag ”

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deposited by Rahim Dad at Masqat, which would have been forthcoming had the arms been safely landed at Ziarat.

Rahim Dad bade the Afghans bear up, however, and promised as soon as he had delivered the timber to Barkat Khan he would set forth to search for the rifles and ammunition still being tossed about, perhaps, at the mercy of the waves. He feared, though, that, after this length of time, the currents and wind had probably scattered the precious baulks far and wide, and the task would be no easy one. He issued a cordial invitation to any of the Afghans who wished to accompany him in the quest. Having just learnt, however, of the fate of their two companions, there was a marked lack of zeal among those safely ashore at Ziarat to embark with Rahim Dad. Thus he set sail next day with his crew alone.

It was as well, perhaps, for the peace of mind of the Afghans that none were aboard, as it was practically impossible to undertake a lengthy examination of the sea, in those waters, without coming in contact with a patrolling cruiser. During several days' tacking and beating about, the dhow was forced on three or four occasions to submit to search, but as Rahim Dad carried little or no cargo his detention was usually a short one. He naturally took small interest

in proceedings now, and yet felt it incumbent to convince his crew that he was doing his best for them and the Afghans. Only once, though, during their cruise did they alight on a baulk ; and when that was hauled aboard it was not very surprising to find it had nothing attached to it. As a *shamal* was threatening, Rahim Dad decided at last to return to Ziarat to report to the Afghans the ill-success of his efforts.

The Afghans were grievously disappointed, and yet were forced to confess that, had their arms not been consigned to the deep during the pursuit of the dhow, their present state would have been no better. Indeed, it would have been worse ; for was not Rahim Dad free, and his dhow still available to assist their compatriots on the other side ?

That generous soul, while cursing the British as nothing short of low-down pirates of the main, now volunteered to run a cargo of arms free of charge, if the Afghans felt disposed to back his luck in another venture. This sounded most self-denying ; but, as these particular Afghans had the bare wherewithal left to see them home again, the proposal raised little enthusiasm. Then one of them inquired if the offer would apply to their friends at Masqat still awaiting an opportunity to dispatch their arms across. As a very special concession, Rahim Dad agreed to make

it do so ; because, he said, he keenly felt his loss of *izzat* (honour) in having failed to land his last consignment.

And so it was arranged that Rahim Dad should return to Matrah, armed with a note for one of the Afghans there from his friends at Ziarat. Although none of the Afghans was inclined to accompany him, Rahim Dad set sail with twenty or thirty young Baluchis, who were anxious to take part in some festival coming off at Masqat in honour of the Sultan's birthday. That was rather an event for the simple coastal people on this side of the water ; and in the largeness of his heart Rahim Dad was taking them across free gratis. But they were to make their own arrangements for getting back, as he could not guarantee them a return passage.

Thus far Rahim Dad's story, which, of course, was only disclosed to me at a later date. Beyond this point I will not anticipate him, because after his departure from Ziarat, he came under my personal observation again, thanks to watchful eyes on the other side.

His advent at Matrah was duly cabled to me by one of my agents ; so I presumed he had made his peace with the Afghans at Ziarat, and that it would not be long before further developments followed. It was something of a disappointment, therefore, to learn a week or so later that Rahim

Dad had thoroughly entered into the spirit of carnival at Masqat, with certain young Baluchis, and done little or nothing in arranging to run arms for Afghans. However, one could but wait patiently to see what the morrow might bring forth; for to communicate with him was out of the question, since his promised co-operation was known only to me and my chief agent at Jashk.

He had certainly played fair by me once, but I by no means accepted as gospel that he would continue to do so, if he thought he could make more money otherwise. Hence, when the cable flashed the news that Rahim Dad had departed from Matrah, it was immediately passed on by wireless to all blockading ships. But this time, I frankly confess, I was entirely in the dark as to what he had aboard, if anything. Still, on principle, it seemed desirable that if he were intercepted he and his dhow should be brought into Jashk.

But my astonishment may be pictured on receiving a wireless from a new cruiser just out from home: "Have captured a dhow off Ziarat. Skipper answers to name of Rahim Dad. He carries no cargo. Passengers consist of dancing-girls and some 'tom-tom-wallahs' proceeding to important wedding. Propose permitting dhow to continue voyage."

The bare idea of Rahim Dad in the rôle of a guileless skipper conveying this bevy of beauty to a marriage feast excited my curiosity. Had the old boy wearied of bearing arms for Mars, and was he now seeking solace in the smiles of Venus? It would be interesting to learn; so I promptly replied, "Suggest dhow be brought into Jashk." To which the commander agreed.

When the dhow was later beached at Jashk I hastened to the spot, and was met by the commander of the cruiser in his steam pinnacle, which had towed it ashore. Although new to the East, he had very wisely refrained from interfering in any way with the crowd of heavily veiled and gaily-bedecked sirens that constituted Rahim Dad's main cargo. As the officer had strictly avoided offending Mohammedan prejudices in such matters, he probably wondered what advantage there could be in bringing this gaudy baggage into Jashk. I was not quite sure myself. However.

Evening was drawing near, so I told Rahim Dad to explain to the disgruntled ladies that I felt certain they would be glad to spend the night ashore, after being cooped up for so long; but they would be at liberty to continue their voyage next day. I would arrange, therefore, to have a small camp pitched for them near the sepoy lines. This business settled, I intimated to the com-

mander of the cruiser that there seemed no necessity to detain him if he desired to get under way again before dark. He accordingly returned to his ship, whilst we set about disembarking the nautch girls and their few male companions.

Twenty-five females in all stepped ashore with a considerable jingling and clanging of silver bracelets and anklets. The five men comprising the musicians of the party were more soberly dressed, and armed only with their *dols*, or cylindrical double-ended drums. The damsels were certainly sturdy in appearance, though they ran rather too much to *embonpoint* to be regarded as "graceful as gazelles." Their life of ease and good feeding would account, to some extent, for this, though one would imagine their saltatory exercises should have served to keep their figures within less robust bounds. However, far be it from me to urge Western ideas of beauty of form on the Oriental mind.

With their bundles and baskets of belongings this holiday-attired crowd waddled after the sepoys deputed to conduct them to their intended camping-ground for the night. The whole Telegraph *enclave* was protected by a barbed-wire entanglement from sea to sea, for there was a possibility of the station being attacked by the Afghans, as reprisals for captures of their arms. Our visitors, consequently, were safely penned

in for the night ; but two sentries were placed over their small camp as well, to ensure privacy, it was explained, from inquisitive eyes during their stay at Jashk.

These details completed, Rahim Dad was informed that he and his crew might remain on board the dhow ; but at the close of our interview I asked him to arrange for the nautch party to give us a display later on when they were comfortably settled down for the night. I felt sure they would like to take this opportunity of stretching their limbs after being huddled up for so long during the sea passage, and regrettable detention by the cruiser. Being in holiday mood, he warmly approved my suggestion. At the same time I twitted the hoary old sinner for abandoning the conveyance of arms for the poorly-paid substitute in the way of cargo brought by him from the other side this trip. He merely smiled, and enigmatically remarked that the evening's entertainment should, at least, provide a welcome change to the ordinary life at Jashk.

The sepoys were, of course, delighted at the prospect of a nautch to relieve the monotony of their existence on the Jashk sand-spit. Although the spring weather was now more than genial, they constructed a huge bonfire in the centre of the arena marked out for the performance, so that none of the movements of the troupe should be lost.

The scene at which we put in our appearance after dinner was a gay one. The sepoys formed a large hollow square, squatting round the blazing logs in the centre. Along the other side of the square were reclining the portly bejewelled dancing girls, who were distributed on each side of the five musicians. Having cast their veils, they somewhat surlily, it seemed to me, awaited the order to begin the dance. Chairs had been placed for the few other Europeans of the station and myself on the opposite side of the square to the performers.

On our arrival, Rahim Dad, who had constituted himself Master of the Ceremonies, gave the signal for the band to strike up. Slow droning beats by the drummers' hands, accompanied by a dirge-like chant in high falsetto voices, announced the *tamasha* was about to begin. The female performers rose wearily to their feet, and with expressionless faces formed a ring round the bonfire. Evidently a *pas seul* had no place in the programme; for the entire troupe sidled with studied deliberation from right to left along the circumference of their circle. After a time they reversed the motion, by stamping and gliding their way back to the opposite direction, now adding their high-pitched voices to the chant of the drummers. They waxed somewhat more enthusiastic by degrees, and put a modicum of

life into their steps, but the display was far from convincing.

I summoned Rahim Dad to my side at the end of the first figure, when the dancers resumed their places on the ground for a brief rest. I had seen Baluch dances before, I told him, but nothing quite so dismal as what he had hashed up for us. We wanted to be carried away by the enthusiasm of the dancers, and I should expect something more lively in the rest of the programme. He went off to convey my wishes to the musicians and the dancing-girls, who received the message with ill-concealed chagrin.

The musicians did, however, strike up with more inspiration than, and proceedings became less funereal. The dancers made some effort to entertain their audience, for they indulged in more energetic undulations and gyrations of body and limbs, which was exactly what I wanted. They were now getting worked up and less conscious of self, whilst carried away by the wild "tom-tomming" of the drums.

"Faster," I cried out to Rahim Dad; and faster droned the drums as the circle clanked round the fire with sparkling anklets and bracelets. I was watching the performers closely, and, without wishing to demand too much from the dusky belles, had a suspicion they were capable of yet greater energy.

“ Still faster, Rahim Dad,” shouted I above the din. The night was warm ; the bonfire more so. And soon great beads of perspiration glistened over the countenances of the burly maidens, as they made efforts to respond to the music. I watched and listened attentively. What was that ? Surely I detected, amid the uproar, the hollow sound of wood striking against wood ? It issued, too, from the dripping forms of the madly twirling crowd !

The Indian officer was quietly beckoned to my side. He slipped away with ten sepoy collected from the onlookers ; but the dance continued.

At length the drum-beats died away on a signal from me, and the exhausted dancers threw themselves panting upon the ground about the musicians. They were immediately surrounded by a party of sepoy with fixed bayonets, who emerged from the darkness without. The troupe were powerless to resist or disperse. Thus ringed in by bayonets, they presented a bedraggled spectacle of surprised indignation. To banish all uncertainty I addressed them as follows :

“ Beardless youths ! You have played your part well to-night, and this nautch has afforded us all a very pleasant evening’s entertainment. When you came ashore you were weary and ill at ease ; so, what better than music and dancing to cheer up your spirits ? I had my suspicions, but desired

to make quite sure. The nautch has dispelled all doubt. If your bodies are not swathed with Mauser pistols and ammunition, beneath your women's wedding garments, forgive me for the search which will now be made."

A bomb could scarcely have created greater consternation; and a babel of protestation arose from the supposed nautch girls. Turning to the Indian officer I told him to march off the prisoners to the guard-room, and there examine them thoroughly. The *tamasha* then broke up.

Rahim Dad promptly took a back seat when my decision was announced, and tried to melt away, it seemed to me, in the crowd. But I sent my chief agent after him, and told him to bring the old ruffian to my quarters. They joined me there presently, and I attacked the rogue at once with, "Well, old son. What about it?"

The veteran in sin smiled benignly, "Excellent, sahib, excellent. No better could you have done, had I told you."

This was not exactly the reply I expected. I sought some explanation of his being mixed up in this sorry attempt to bamboozle us, and said so. He then related the yarn forming the earlier portion of this story.

When he stopped to take breath, I let him know that his wild festival keeping at Masqat had been reported to me; and inquired if these sup-

posititious nautch girls were the young Baluchis he was there said to be fraternizing with. He owned the soft impeachment. They had been selected for their beardless countenances which, if their bodies were appropriately attired, might very well pass muster for those of dancing-girls.

Continuing, Rahim Dad stated that he had pointed out to the Afghans at Masqat the great risk now attending the transportation of rifles; but that he thought he could probably run Mauser pistols across in some quantities. These, he emphasized to them, were practically as good as rifles. Were they not sighted up to 1,000 yards, and could they not be fired from the shoulder by affixing the wooden case to form a butt of 15 inches to the weapon? Also, they occupied little space, weighed less than two *seers*,¹ and so forth. In short, he would guarantee, under certain conditions, to conceal half a dozen such pistols, and 600 rounds of ammunition, about a single person. And he did it—to the complete satisfaction of his Afghan employers.

Thus Rahim Dad's young Baluch friends were transformed into a bevy of portly dancing-girls by the garments and jewellery they had taken with them from Ziarat. Special straps and under-jackets, after the style of life-belts with suitable

¹ A *seer* is about 2 lb. avoirdupois.

pockets, were evolved by local *dirzis* (tailors) at Masqat for the reception of arms and ammunition. For these, of course, the Afghans paid.

Rahim Dad then set sail up the coast with his nautch party, thoroughly enjoying the novel situation. They found it less entertaining, perhaps, weighted as they were to the extent of 30 to 40 lb. about the waist and shoulders when they embarked.

Something, of course, went wrong with the works the night he made the dash across the narrow seas for Ziarat. Pulleys jammed at a critical moment, and it was found impossible to lower the sail when picked up by the beam of a searchlight. The dhow was detected ; and, while making a bolt for it, the main halyard parted, in some unaccountable way, bringing the great sail down with a run when they were not very far from their destination. The dhow, in consequence, became an easy prey to the pursuing cruiser.

"The rest is known to you, sahib," concluded Rahim Dad.

"Yes," replied I, scathingly, "the rest is known to me. From your account, then, you purposely played some tricks with your dhow's gear, which led to her capture. Good ; but you appeared to forget, when you arrived in Jashk with your beautiful nautch girls, to whisper in my ear who or what they really were, and what was concealed

about their persons. It seems to me I am not indebted entirely to you for our haul, eh ? ”

“ That, sahib, was precisely my hope. Being a lover of truth, I can now swear by the beard of the Prophet, should any man doubt my honesty in this matter, that naught did I divulge to living soul at Jashk. You will bear me out. Is it not so ? Yet was I pleased when you ordered the nautch : for then I knew your suspicions were aroused and the truth would be revealed. Let me see : 150 rifles at two rupees each, makes 300 rupees : and 15,000 cartridges is another 30 rupees. Therefore, sahib, 330 rupees in all are due to me from you.”

A FREAK GUIDE

It seemed to me, as a friendly observer, that Rahim Dad had got himself into rather a hole by enlisting the services of these young Baluchis in his latest adventure; but I did not emphasize this point when he claimed the reward of Rs.330 from me at the conclusion of the nautch. I did bring to his notice, however, that the Indian officer had not yet reported the number of weapons and amount of ammunition found on the supposed dancing-girls; and that when this was definitely ascertained Rahim Dad would receive the reward agreed upon. Meanwhile he was free to return to his dhow and await payment until the morrow.

Shortly after his departure the Indian officer arrived at my quarters, and stated that 150 Mausers and 15,000 rounds of ammunition had been discovered about the persons of the troupe in the guard-room. Rahim Dad's claim was, accordingly, correct; and I looked forward to hearing his future plans, and how he proposed to right himself in the eyes of the Afghans, and those

who would now be incarcerated for having become his tools in his latest exploit.

Judge of my surprise early next morning, therefore, to learn that Rahim Dad and his dhow had completely vanished from the scene. He had evidently taken fright, then, and cleared during the hours of darkness with his fleet craft. Seeing that I was his debtor to the extent of Rs.330, this was, to say the least of it, remarkable, as the covetous old ruffian was not in the habit of performing services for nothing, or merely for the excitement of the thing. Consequently I was rather nonplussed on hearing of his flight, but was sure he must have some very strong grounds for leaving that sum in my hands on account, so to speak.

The rogue entirely disappeared from my ken for quite an appreciable period. Masqat and Matrah knew him not. At length I learnt from my agents on that side, however, that Rahim Dad's old friend and brother skipper, Salih, had recently turned up, and was apparently hobnobbing with Afghans in a distinctly suspicious manner. Later, my intelligence service reinforced this information by stating that Salih had departed north with some 750 rifles and 200,000 rounds of ammunition destined for the Sultan of Bahrein, one of our friendly potentates higher up the Persian Gulf. The news was passed on to the

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blockading ships; but as Salih cruised north as far as Cape Masandam in territorial waters, there was no justification for interference with him or his cargo.

A week or ten days after Salih's departure from Matrah, we were visited by the fiercest *shamal* that I remember during the whole time I was associated with the gun-running operations. The wind blew with terrific force, and the sea was so rough that mail steamers were unable to land passengers or goods at New Jashk from the open roadstead, owing to the heavy surf that beat upon the shore. Rain also descended for several days on end in a manner extremely rare in those regions. Four inches fell in four days, beating all previous records for twenty-five years. The surrounding country was temporarily flooded, and traffic along the flat coastal plains became very difficult in consequence.

Amidst all this hurly-burly of the elements, I received information from an agent on the telegraph line connecting Jashk with Chahbar that a large consignment of arms and ammunition had been landed during the hours of darkness in a sheltered bay near Lash, about 15 miles to the east of Jashk. One of the cruisers also reported sighting a dhow in the neighbourhood early that morning when the gale was at its height. She gave chase to the dhow, which was then sailing

in a westerly direction, but lost sight of it in the thick haze caused by the torrential downpour of rain; and notwithstanding an extended search she was never able to pick it up again.

So, there we were. Arms had unfortunately eluded the cordon of cruisers during those tempestuous days. But he must, indeed, have been a bold skipper who had dared to face the abnormally existing forces of nature, combined with the dangers of the blockading ships, with so valuable a cargo. Further news reported that Afghans had been awaiting the arrival of the consignment at Lash, and had immediately transferred rifles and ammunition by means of camels and donkeys to the low broken foot-hills a few miles inland from the sea.

A day or two after these evil tidings had reached me—for I could not but regard this cargo of arms as lost to us now—my hopes were raised by learning that a small force of all arms was shortly sailing from India in a transport, with the intention of raiding *caches* still concealed within reasonable distance of the Persian coast. There yet remained a faint chance, therefore, of recovering these arms if the gods were good to us.

A few nights later, when the storm had abated and all the inmates of the Telegraph *enclave* were wrapped in sleep, I was not a little astonished to be awakened by my chief agent, in order, he

said, that Rahim Dad might be permitted to speak to me on an urgent matter. "The old blighter getting anxious about his Rs.330," muttered I to myself, as I turned up the lamp, struggled into a dressing-gown, and thrust my feet into a pair of slippers.

"Show the old budmash in," I then said aloud to my right hand, "and let's hear what his trouble is."

And thus the old sea-dog again entered my presence, but not quite so jauntily as of yore, it seemed to me. Placing my forefinger across my mouth, I indicated to him that his tale of woe must be whispered, lest the occupants of the adjoining quarters in the Telegraph block should become aware of this midnight intrusion.

He launched forth by saying he had a confession to make. It was he who had landed the consignment of arms at Lash. I was not altogether surprised, for I had felt pretty confident that no other navigator of these narrow seas would have risked the passage of such valuable stuff under such boisterous conditions. Nevertheless, it suited my purpose to express amazement, and to simulate wrath and disappointment at his backsliding. "So it *was* you then?" I threatened. "Very well; now that you have been good enough to admit what I suspected, you shall join your Baluch friends imprisoned in the Persian fort

outside. They will, without doubt, tear you limb from limb, to show you how they love you for having got them there."

"Nay, sahib, nay," remonstrated the old man ; "it was to escape their unjust suspicions, and those of the Afghans, that I did this seeming evil towards the Sirkar. But if your honour will hear me out patiently, good may yet come out of this sad affair."

"Speak on," retorted I ; "tell me all from the beginning. I suppose you ran away from here without your Rs.330 because you dare not face the light of day after that noisy nautch."

The wrinkled, weather-beaten face broke into a wan smile, and he chuckled softly to himself. "Yes, that was a great *tamasha*, sahib. When I left your honour's presence I ran the whole way to the dhow, and was much out of breath. Quickly I told my men in trembling tones what had happened at the nautch, and that we must sail at once lest you should make prisoners of us also. We had already mended the damaged rigging, so soon had the dhow in the water and set sail for Ziarat, where we arrived at break of day. Those cruel Afghans at once surrounded us, and desired at first to slay me ; but my men know all that had taken place and were able to swear to the truth of what I spake. Thus, the true cause of the calamity, your wisdom, sahib, was

made clear to them and to the friends and relatives of those poor young Baluchis in the prison without ; and if some day these same Afghans should, by chance, meet you—which Allah grant may never be!—your honour's life may be shortened." A sad sigh followed.

That was a cheery piece of intelligence, at all events, for which I had to thank my kind accomplice ; but I bade him bear up and continue his story. As the Oriental story-teller is inclined, however, to be long-winded and to branch off into numerous digressions, I propose to summarize the tale unfolded during that interesting interview, which extended into the small hours before Rahim Dad slipped away again into the outer darkness.

Since Rahim Dad's luck appeared to be dead out, and the Afghans, despite recent failures, were sufficiently pertinacious to wish still to assist their compatriots on the other side in getting arms across to the Persian coast, the aid of Salih was advocated by Rahim Dad. The old boy rightly came to the conclusion that his movements were too closely shadowed in the Masqat-Matrah area to ensure success, and suggested as much to the Afghans. When Salih was summoned to the councils, however, he demurred at running the arms across ; but was agreeable to putting the secret service agents off the scent by carrying arms ostensibly

for the Sultan of Bahrein ; and these would be handed over to Rahim Dad at some remote spot along the Oman peninsula. Thus Rahim Dad would not come into the picture at all in the earlier stages of the enterprise.

That his surmise was correct subsequent events had proved ; for we had completely lost all touch with Rahim Dad from the time he fled from Jashk until this nocturnal confessional. We knew that Salih had set sail for Bahrein, but did not definitely know the name of the *nakhuda* (skipper) who had successfully landed the recent consignment of arms at Lash. Now all was clear. The Afghans at Ziarat moved east to Lash, where they collected the necessary transport for a short shift. Salih got into touch with the Afghans at Matrah, and divulged the new plan to them. Rahim Dad slipped away from Ziarat to some point far from the haunts of men in the rocky fiords of Cape Masandam, where he awaited the advent of Salih. The transshipment of arms and three Afghans from Salih's dhow to Rahim Dad's was made by night at this obscure spot. Salih then continued north for some days longer to support the illusion created by him at Matrah ; whilst Rahim Dad travelled by night only, and in a southerly direction, within territorial limits, seeking an opportunity to dash across to Lash.

The fierce *shamal* furnished it ; and, though his

three Afghan passengers were by no means enthusiastic about facing the open sea in such a terrifying storm, the confidence of the experienced skipper prevailed over their fears, and they finally agreed to the dart being undertaken. Such a night, Rahim Dad assured me, he rarely remembered ; but his splendid sea-boat fairly flew before the wind ; and though the Afghans were prostrated by sea-sickness, the stakes they were playing for were high. And they did have the grace to admit, when they were safely ashore at Lash, that the murky atmosphere had supplied a sure shield of defence against cruiser searchlights during the tempestuous passage.

The Afghans were on the look-out at Lash, and their hired animals were quickly collected at the point of disembarkation to remove the arms and ammunition into the foot-hills some miles inland. Having dumped his cargo ashore during the few remaining hours of darkness, and seen the Afghans loaded up and off, Rahim Dad set sail for Ziarat shortly before dawn. He now had the exciting experience of being chased by a cruiser in a blinding storm ; and though he and his sturdy men had nothing of an incriminating nature on board they entered into the spirit of the contest. By holding on their course nearer in-shore than the cruiser dare venture off that shallow coastline, they succeeded at length in eluding the attentions

of their pursuer, and safely reached Ziarat before nightfall.

After a short rest Rahim Dad set off on foot for Jashk. "And here I am, sahib," concluded he, "to warn your honour of all that has happened since last we parted."

"Yes, old fraud, and you are likely to remain here, too, so far as I can foresee—until your Baluch friends have put an end to your miserable prison existence. It is daylight clear that you have played into the hands of the Afghans this trip. Got nothing from them, of course, and merely wanted to re-establish yourself in their good graces, eh?" He nodded assent. "Well, there is some reason in that, since you are carrying your life in your pocket in this game; but for them to get clean away with 750 rifles and all that ammunition, and by your help, too, is a pretty tall order to overlook. What now?"

"People say," replied he in apologetic tones, watching my expression through the corners of his eyes as he made the announcement, "that the Sirkar is sending a *fauj* (army) on ships from Hindustan to fight the Afghans, and take away from them all the arms they have collected along this coast."

Now this news was supposed to be secret and confidential, and I had not yet informed even my chief agent of the fact; so I wondered how this

unsophisticated old sea-faring bloke had obtained knowledge of the Government's intention. But I was not going to give the show away at this juncture, and turned the assertion aside with an air of jocularly, by adding, "And you wish to enlist in this *faruj*, to fight the Afghans and help recover the arms you have been wicked enough to land for them this season?"

No, this was not precisely his desire; but he thought it might be helpful if he could point out on a large scale map the approximate spot at which the latest *cache* of arms was concealed, should the rumour prove correct. So, pretending to humour the old man, behold the three of us poring over a map whereon, by the subdued rays of a lamp, the sea-dog pointed out exactly where he had landed the consignment, and whither it had been removed by the Afghans.

I was surprised that the illiterate creature understood a map at all, but every indentation of that coastline seemed as familiar to him as the points of the compass, and likewise the tracks and topographical features extending inland from the sea-shore. I frankly admit, therefore, that we derived much valuable information which came in useful later.

Having thus made his peace with us, as he supposed, he asked my permission to depart. To this I agreed, for he had apparently been

truthful as to the part he had played, and I inwardly hoped "some good might yet come of this sad affair," as he had at first suggested. But when the rogue, taking advantage of my momentary graciousness, then calmly asked payment of the Rs.330 owing to him, I bluntly informed him all that would be forfeited if the Afghans got away with his last landing. He must, therefore, still wait awhile. With this mild rebuff he disappeared with my fidus Achates into the blackness without, and I resumed my disturbed slumbers.

Next day I received a wireless message from the Admiral commanding the East Indies Squadron saying that he was on his way to Jashk, and was being followed by a transport containing a small mixed force of artillery, sappers, and infantry, with mule transport, which he proposed to utilize ashore for raiding arms *caches*. He expected to arrive the next morning, and I should be ready to come aboard with all necessary information regarding such *caches*, as soon as the flagship dropped anchor.

The flagship arrived at the stated time, and I was conveyed out to her in a steam launch sent ashore for the purpose. On receiving my report the Admiral steamed away up the coast; but returned again after dark, when a boat was dispatched to take me and my chief agent aboard

with our bedding, etc. The flagship then left for a rendezvous out of sight of land, where the transport was met soon after daylight, and all arrangements made for landing the force at Khor Lash after dark that evening.

The two ships steamed quietly to the appointed spot, which was reached at dusk, and the disembarkation was commenced at 8 p.m. in a calm sea under bright moonlight; but owing to the shallow nature of the coast the ships had to stand a mile and a half out from land, which added greatly to the length of the operation. Nevertheless, the force was under way by daylight; but a long march lay before it, as the Afghans had recently removed their *cache* farther inland.

Fortunately, soon after the advance commenced, we pounced upon a solitary stupid-looking old Baluch yokel, with a hunched back, high falsetto voice, and a face wrinkled like a walnut. The face was totally devoid of any hirsute appendage, and thus quite unlike that of the generality of the local natives. Its owner seemed the usual senile loafing village idiot; but the "loony" evidently had some wits about him, for when offered a reward of Rs.100 to conduct us through this intricate country, to the place where our information led us to believe the Afghans were settled, his demeanour changed, though up to then

he had denied, in the dithering accents of an imbecile, the presence of any gun-runners in the neighbourhood.

His services enlisted, he was given the place of honour in front between two sepoys of the advanced guard; and the force tramped steadily in his wake for several hours. By that time we had reached an inhospitable sandy region, broken by numerous low hills and narrow winding stony nullahs. The bent bumpkin now began to exhibit signs of trepidation whilst explaining that the Afghan place of concealment was close at hand. Emerging shortly after on to the summit of a low ridge, the advanced guard was heavily sniped from a line of *sangars* beyond; and it became clear that our objective had been attained.

Into the details of the action which followed I do not propose to enter; but it may be said the small party of Afghans put up a stout resistance for some time. They were greatly outnumbered, however, and the infantry attack, supported by mountain and machine guns, gradually overcame their powers of endurance. They were driven headlong from their strong position, leaving several dead and badly wounded Ghilzais behind, together with all their arms and ammunition save what they carried on them in their precipitate flight.

The crack of the rifles, the boom of the guns, and the screeching of the shells through the air, followed by the bursting of the shrapnel over the *sangars*, obviously afforded the greatest interest to our old Baluch guide. He became almost beside himself with excitement, and displayed childish glee during the scrap, the explosion of the shells calling forth ejaculations of astonishment and approval. The whistling of the enemy's bullets about his ears appeared, on the other hand, to occasion him but little concern. In his younger and saner days he had, doubtless, shared in many a tribal affray, like the majority of his countrymen.

At the termination of the fight he proved useful, too, in identifying the dead Afghans, all of whom he seemed to know by the names they bore in life. The man apparently was not such a fool as he looked; for he evinced marked disapproval when he saw the captured arms being ruthlessly destroyed on the spot, and the numerous boxes of ammunition formed into dumps and blown to smithereens by explosives. Such wanton destruction of possessions highly prized by Afghan and Baluch seemed to cut him to the quick, judging by his mournful exclamations and regretful mien during this part of the performance.

We bivouacked for the night on the scene of the conflict, and marched back next morning to Khor

Lash under the direction of our half-witted guide. As the flagship and transport had sailed for Jashk on completion of the disembarkation, the force proceeded thither the following day by land. Our strange new acquaintance accompanied us, in order to be paid off for his services on arrival at the Telegraph *enclave*.

On reaching Jashk the force re-embarked on the transport; and whilst this operation was in progress the freak guide was brought round to my quarters for payment of the Rs.100 promised to him. This sum paid over, the stupid-looking fellow drew himself up to his full height, his hunched back subsided beneath his sheepskin coat, and in deep familiar tones he expostulated, with twinkling eyes, "But, sahib, why have I forfeited the Rs.330 that you still owe me? And am I to get nought for delivering into your hands all those rifles and ammunition I landed at Lash for the Afghans?"

The limb of Satan! Still, Rahim Dad thoroughly deserved the additional reward bestowed upon him for having assisted in the recovery of the arms, and so completely hoodwinking my chief agent and myself during the past few days. But he thought it wise to hide himself for a space, with only a portion of his newly-gotten riches, in the wilds of Bashakard. There he would grow afresh his beard and whiskers—after this period of mourning

for an imaginary deceased wife—before rejoining his old friends at Ziarat.

Thus, he decided to leave Rs.2,000 on account with us until called for ; and readjusted his hunched back prior to bidding us a fond farewell.

MILCH COWS

Rahim Dad was lost to us for some time in the wilds of Bashakard. As that region had become the hiding-place of many Afghans and coastal Baluch miscreants, who were in our black books for having taken a prominent part in the gun-running operations of the season, one could well picture the crafty rogue thoroughly at his ease among his former fellow-conspirators. He would, doubtless, explain that he, too, was a fugitive from justice ; and had assumed his present disguise in order to make good his escape from our attentions. Now that he was surrounded by friends again, however, he proposed to dwell peacefully with them until the hue and cry after him had subsided.

Meanwhile, with the object of still further agitating the Baluch inhabitants of the coast, the transport had sailed from Jashk as soon as the force was re-embarked there, and disappeared into the gloom. Out of the blue it had suddenly emerged next day at Chahbar, 150 miles to the east of Jashk. A portion of the troops was landed,

and a demonstration made in favour of the British telegraph station and small garrison of Indian infantry there. This *enclave*, too, had been for some time threatened by a large body of Afghans, temporarily settled in the hills near by, as a reprisal for arms captured at sea. The Baluch residents of Chahbar town being duly edified by a sight of the *fauj*, the troops again vanished. They dropped in from nowhere at Sirik, some 250 miles to the west of Chahbar, a day or two later, and had since continued the motion.

These surprise visits kept the whole coast-line from Bandar Abbas to Gwatar in a state of feverish uncertainty as to where the *fauj* might next be landed. Extreme caution was therefore imposed on all who had hitherto gloried in the arms traffic ; and particularly on those Afghans still hanging about Masqat and Matrah in the hope of getting arms across the sea. No *nakhuda* could be prevailed upon now to undertake so risky an adventure in face of the fresh combination at sea. Such Afghans as had previously wandered at will along the Biaban and Makran coastal plains deemed it prudent to make themselves scarce, when news of the capture of the arms landed at Lash spread throughout this portion of Persian Baluchistan. They departed, therefore, with their camels to the shelter of the rugged hills and valleys of Basha-kard, bordering these narrow sandy wastes.

Thus a comparative calm settled upon the scene about Jashk for a while, as Afghan and Baluch were up against a formidable proposition which caused much scratching of heads and thinking. Consequently, I could imagine Rahim Dad, the expert, being frequently consulted by his Afghan associates in Bashakard as to what was to be done now. But what advice he was likely to give them in their dilemma was not easy to guess.

There was one aspect of the situation, however, with which I was not entirely satisfied, and that was the presence of Rahim Dad's confederates of the nautch incident, thirty in number, whom we had imprisoned in the Persian fort at Jashk under suitable sepoy guard. We had been feeding these rogues now for close on three weeks ; and it did not seem altogether desirable from the local point of view to continue doing so indefinitely. This matter had been impressed on Rahim Dad before he took his departure for Bashakard ; but he was very loth to have his friends at large just then, and munificently agreed to my setting aside the sum of Rs.200 p.m. as a maintenance allowance out of the Rs.2,000 he had left with me on deposit after the Lash affair. The only stipulation he made was that those imprisoned should learn casually that it was he who had landed the arms at Lash for the Afghans. There was little difficulty in meeting his wishes, and the prisoners

soon became aware that Rahim Dad had bolted from Jashk after the nautch, and brought off the latest successful *coup* near by.

This was satisfactory so far as it went, but the small garrison at Jashk still had to find the guard for the fort, which was a nuisance. So when the Daria Begi, the Persian Governor of the Persian Gulf coast-line, arrived at Jashk shortly afterwards in his steamer, on one of his periodical tours from Bushire to the ports within his jurisdiction, the iniquities of Rahim Dad and the confined Baluchis were brought to his notice.

The prisoners received a severe rebuke in my presence from their Governor, who threatened them with gruesome penalties if they again transgressed by assisting Afghans in their nefarious designs. On piously swearing that they would never have anything further to do with gun-running, the young ruffians were permitted by the Governor, with my gracious assent, to depart to their homes. Not that I imagined the fervid eloquence of the Daria Begi on the wickedness of gun-running came directly from his heart, or that it would overawe his youthful listeners; for I had strong reason to believe that his Excellency covertly approved of his subjects amassing money by this means. Much of it would eventually find its way into his pocket in the form of spurious taxes due to him.

That, however, was a detail of Persian administration of which I was not supposed to have any cognizance. Still, I did flatter myself the young prisoners had not found their period of incarceration enjoyable; and they would certainly be nervous in future when they heard of the surprise visits of the *fauj* at numerous points along the coast. I was not sorry, therefore, to see the last of them; and the cost of maintenance, Rs.200, was chalked up against Rahim Dad's deposit account.

As for that monster, the Daria Begi regretted he could not bring him to book during his present tour, owing to the rascal having fled to districts inaccessible to the few *tufangchis* (riflemen) his Excellency had on board his steamer. But he would not lose sight of his misdeeds, should Rahim Dad ever fall into his hands. This undertaking was all eye-wash, as I knew full well. Rahim Dad's past services to us would not have been thus treacherously requited by me had I feared the wrath of the Governor descending upon him hereafter. Anyhow, no breath of suspicion could now rest in any quarter on Rahim Dad regarding his share in our recent successes. And as the gun-running season was rapidly drawing to a close, I hoped that he would be able to resume before long his honoured and unchallenged position amongst the bold skippers ploughing the main

between Persia and Arabia; and, peradventure, assist the British authorities, *sub rosa*, another year.

About this period intelligence from Masqat depicted the few remaining Afghans there as becoming desperate. The time was approaching when they should be setting forth on their return journey to Kabul and Herat, loaded with the thousands of rifles they had counted on obtaining to convert into hard cash—at much profit—on reaching their homes. Yet, so far they had comparatively little to show for their large outlay this season. It was fairly certain, however, that they would not throw up the sponge without at least one more supreme effort to make good before trekking north; and the main problem confronting us was what form this effort was likely to take.

Our arrangements for checkmating the arms traffic in the narrow seas south of Ras Masandam were about as good as the necessarily limited means at our disposal permitted. But there was always the possibility of the Afghans and their advisers attempting to break fresh ground in their frantic endeavour to outwit the forces arrayed against them. In order to justify his reputation, and perhaps even his existence, Rahim Dad would probably, as previously hinted, be drawn into the counsels of these pertinacious schemers. One continued to hope, however, that

he would not lightly face the forfeiture of his Rs.1,800 in our hands, which might be conveniently regarded as a hostage for his loyalty to our cause.

The calm following the capture of the arms at Lash and the surprise visits of the British force elsewhere, was at length disturbed by news from the Arabian side that divers Arab and Baluch *nakhudas* were conveying arms and ammunition for the Afghans from Matrah to Sohar—a port about 120 miles farther up the Batinah coast. The dhows plied within territorial waters, and travelled by night only.

Later intelligence announced the gathering of many Bedouin camels in the vicinity of Sohar, and the next move in the game now became tolerably clear. The Senior Naval Officer in the Gulf was made acquainted with the probable intentions of the Afghan gun-runners, and quietly transferred a patrolling cruiser or two from the Gulf of Oman side of the peninsula through the Straits of Hormuz to the waters west of Ras Masandam. We then waited upon events.

One of the difficulties with which we had been faced, when casting our net of intelligence over the Arabian and Persian coast-line, was the inaccessibility of most of the obscure ports along the inhospitable Batinah coast. The lack of means for transmitting rapid information from

them, even if it had been practicable to establish agents there, was another stumbling-block to maintaining close touch with the wiles of our opponents at these remote fanatical Arab haunts. And though I now had a fairly shrewd idea of what was in the wind, I was glad to receive confirmation of my suspicions from the author of the latest developments, Rahim Dad.

He crept in, as usual, like a thief in the dead of night. His face had resumed its former familiar appearance when he was ushered into the privacy of my apartment, whilst all around at Jashk were wrapped in slumber. The man was evidently bursting with information, and could scarce maintain his accustomed composure in his anxiety to unburden himself of the stirring events afoot.

During the past few weeks he had travelled far and wide to put in train novel methods, which he had convinced the Afghans were the solution of their difficulties. From Bashakard he had proceeded in their interests to Bandar Abbas. Thence he had slipped across with some Afghans in a friend's dhow to Ras Masandam, and hugged the Pirate coast as far south as Sharjah and Dibai. At the latter port they had hired camels from the Bedouin, and trekked for 120 miles in a south-easterly direction across the sandy wastes of the Oman peninsula to Sohar, on the Batinah coast. Their investigation of this possible route

having proved satisfactory, the Afghans and he had entered into a contract with the Bedouin to furnish camels for the transport of arms and ammunition from Sohar to Sharjah and Dibai. From those ports the arms were to be run in dhows to Lingeh and Khamir, 80 to 100 miles distant on the Persian coast, west of Bandar Abbas. No cruisers patrolled that area of the Persian Gulf, so the trip would be a mere walk-over, Rahim Dad had assured his enthusiastic Afghan friends.

Having unfolded his subtle design, with ill-concealed pride for its boldness and originality, Rahim Dad evidently expected his disclosure would knock me all of a heap. The schemer was somewhat taken aback, therefore, when I congratulated him on his cunning, and informed him that this development had already been anticipated. If he should by any chance find himself shortly in the vicinity of Qishm Island, he would probably run across a cruiser or two on the look-out for dhows in those waters. This statement rather turned the tables on the disappointed purveyor of news, who threw up his hands in resignation and murmured, "Verily, your honour devours the thoughts of those who try to deceive the Sirkar."

"You speak truly," retorted I; "but tell me what part you are supposed to be playing in this

game of hide-and-seek. How came you to give your Afghan friends the slip, in order that you might acquaint me of their evil intentions ? ”

“ That is easily explained, sahib. Rahim Dad is, alas ! well known to all that sail these seas.” (I could almost swear that the modest veteran blushed in making this self-laudatory announcement.) “ Therefore, is it not seemly that he and his dhow should remain as a decoy where the Anglez have for long been shadowing him ? What more simple, on his return to fit out his dhow at Ziarat for fresh work, than to take Jashk in on his way, unknown to the cows he is milking ? ” His diffidence presumably led him to adopt this impersonal mode of speech.

“ But if you are to run no arms for the Afghans, what profits it you to remain cruising about in these waters to attract our attention ? ” I inquired of our confederate.

“ That is a matter which I have carefully considered and arranged for,” replied the wily old bird. “ I have drawn all Afghans into the belief that I am their true friend and helper. As for the young Baluchis you tell me the Daria Begi has permitted to return to Ziarat, they will be recompensed for their imprisonment by receiving Rs.20 each from me—when your honour has paid me part of what you owe me before I depart hence. Then shall I be at peace with all mankind.”

Even so, it was not very apparent how money was to be made out of his rôle in the forthcoming operations of the Afghans, though I surmised the risks he intended to run during the remainder of the gun-running season would be reduced to a minimum. In any case, I did not propose to pay him for the information vouchsafed unless he became the direct instrument of arms falling into our hands ; and told him so.

He waved aside my objection. The Anglez had been good and kind to him ; they had paid him handsomely for such humble services as he, Rahim Dad, had been able to perform for them. He rested content with what was still due to him from that source. But these "cut-throat Afghans," they were fair game to feather his nest yet a little more.

For propounding the above scheme, and elaborating all details on the spot for the carriage of arms by sea from Matrah to Sohar, and thence across land to Sharjah and Dibai, the Afghans had guaranteed him a commission of one rupee on every rifle, and eight annas on every box of ammunition safely conveyed to the Pirate coast. There his responsibility ceased, as no further risk was involved in transporting arms thence in dhows to Lingeh and Khamir.

The Afghans, assisted by the persuasive tongue of Rahim Dad, had made their own arrangements

with Persian and Arab *nakhudas* of that area for running the arms across the Gulf. Meanwhile, Rahim Dad, Salih, and one or two other Baluch skippers of the Biaban coast were subsidized to distract the attention of the British in their usual happy hunting grounds east of the Oman peninsula.

Thus craftily had Rahim Dad withdrawn himself from the coils of the Afghans. Whilst ostensibly playing an important part in the new phase of the operations, there was small chance of his coming to grief in his former haunts, as he would indulge in legitimate trade only during his projected trips to and fro. Nor could he be blamed if matters went astray, once the gun-running dhows set out from the Pirate coast ports for the Persian ones opposite. That rested entirely in the hands of Allah, in the view of our old informant.

Glancing dispassionately at the scheme, Rahim Dad certainly seemed to have engineered himself into a very comfortable position. He admitted as much, with a sly twinkle, when I suggested so much; but protested that the Afghans could hardly expect him to run arms across to a coast-line with which he was not familiar! Moreover, he was anxious now to preserve a whole skin, the season being nearly over, so that he might render loyal service to the Anglez in the years

to come. He begged me not to be perturbed, therefore, by the apparent activities of himself, Salih, and others in these narrow seas ; and thought it might be well for the cruisers to concentrate their attention in future to the waters west of Masandam.

Before disappearing as silently as he had come, Rahim Dad applied for a sum of Rs.800 from his deposit account. The greater part of it he proposed to utilize in conciliating the young Baluchis who had been imprisoned at Jashk "in the cause." This money he would explain had been received from the Afghans for landing their arms at Lash. Rahim Dad was not often caught tripping in his hazardous association with those who were his unconscious dupes.

This interview cleared the air completely ; and the confirmation of probable Afghan intentions was passed on now as a practical certainty to the S.N.O. for any action he might think desirable in regard to the re-distribution of his ships.

Shortly afterwards, considerable liveliness was reported in the Gulf of Oman. Dhows were frequently sighted, chased, captured, and examined. They were invariably found to contain nothing but ordinary merchandise, which did not warrant their detention.

Meanwhile, all was quiet off the Pirate coast. Three cruisers lay concealed by day, however,

to the west of Ras Masandam, behind the friendly shelter of Hanjam Island. These stealthily patrolled by night; westwards, in the direction of Lingeh; southwards, as far as the Pirate coast; and northwards to Hormuz Island off Bandar Abbas.

For some time these nocturnal prowls failed to disclose any unusual activity along the Arabian coast. Then a cruiser, returning from her beat to the Pirate coast in the small hours of the morning, picked up with her searchlight a bevy of five dhows in mid-ocean, making north in a spanking breeze. She immediately gave chase, whereupon the detected dhows at once scattered. Two changed course to the north-east, two to the north-west, and one only held on her original course, as though she had nothing to conceal or fear.

But the cruiser followed the last, and wirelessly information regarding the others to the ships then probably in the neighbourhood of Lingeh and Hormuz. All save her special quarry, on which the searchlight steadily played, rapidly disappeared in the darkness. The fugitive dhow had a long start, however; and as her pursuer was incapable of steaming more than eleven knots, the chase proved a long one. Thus day was breaking before the cruiser got on level terms with her prey off the south-west end of Hanjam

Island. The deluded dhow apparently sought to shake off her pursuer—by slipping round the island and entering the shallow water along the southern shores of Qishm—ignorant of the fact that behind the Hanjam mass lay the cruiser base. The suspicious craft was soon forced to heave to, and when boarded by an elated party of bluejackets was found to be carrying an Arab crew, 600 rifles, 200 boxes of ammunition, and their Afghan owners.

Elsewhere, some curious manœuvring might have been observed on the part of the two other cruisers. Away to the west, in the cold light of dawn, a fast sloop off Lingeh was shadowing two dhows, making a bee-line for that port from the south-east. What was aboard these two dhows was unknown to the commander of the sloop; but he interposed his ship between Lingeh and the dhows on principle, until he had an opportunity of ascertaining. The dhows veered away in a suggestive manner more to the north. They now seemed bent on gaining the southern entrance to the Clarence Straits, which separate Qishm Island from the mainland. Once within those narrow, intricate channels, they could confidently count on eluding their pursuer.

Instead of attempting to head them off from these sheltering waters, however, the sloop confined herself, to the intense relief of the *nakhudas*,

to shepherding the fugitives whither she herself would soon be unable to follow them, without grave risk of going ashore. The harbour of safety so near at hand, the hopes of the *nakhudas* rose high ; and their comments on the tactics of their pursuer were not over-complimentary to the intelligence of the naval commander. They were still less so when the skippers gaily steered their crafts into the Straits. For then did the rascals indulge in openly defiant gestures towards their hated foe as their trusty dhows disappeared into this sanctuary. The road was now clear to Khamir, since Lingeh had been denied them.

Yet, strangely enough, similar tactics were being pursued by the other fast sloop off Larak Island, some 35 miles to the north-east of Hanjam. She, too, had fallen in at daylight with a couple of dhows heading in the direction of Bandar Abbas, and gave chase. The dhows tried to separate, one continuing on her course so as to leave Larak to starboard, whilst the other attempted to break away to the east of the island. Like a sheep-dog, dispatched to round up straying members of a flock, the sloop followed hot-foot to head off the wayward craft ; and gradually she forced her to change course into the wake of her companion. Thus the chase was steadily maintained, the sloop contenting herself in shepherding the fugitives past the north-east end of Qishm Island, and

then driving them west along its northern shore towards the upper exit of the Clarence Straits, and their original objective, Khamir.

This inexplicable procedure mystified the anxious *nakhudas* much. In bearing each other company, they relied upon one or the other getting away clear should they, by evil chance, be pursued during their dash for the Persian coast after detection in mid-ocean. They had now, unhappily, fallen in with a second cruiser; but she made no effort to overtake them, and subject one to examination—thus affording an opportunity for the other to escape. The whole affair was puzzling, for in a little while, if the cruiser persisted in such action, they would gain safety in the Straits.

Sure enough, they, too, presently vanished within the winding channels of that tricky coast-line; and their skippers' glee was great at the prospect of landing their cargoes shortly at Khamir. They would have been less confident had they witnessed the smile of success on the face of the commander of the sloop, standing off the entrance to the Straits, as he cheerfully remarked to his Number One, "Well, that settles those two."

Soon there was borne on the morning breeze the sound of the sharp bark of 3-pounders, and the rat-tat-tat of machine-guns, issuing from the recesses of the Straits. The turmoil announced that the mosquito fleet of powerful armed tugs,

concealed therein, was engaged with the dhows in the narrow channels where there was little room for manœuvre, and no chance of escape from this lair.

Earlier in the morning, a similar engagement had taken place more than 20 miles away, near the southern entrance to the Straits. There three other tugs had overwhelmed the two dhows that sought safety in those waters, and compelled one to disgorge 700 rifles, 250 boxes of ammunition, and ten Afghans. The other dhow, intended to act as a decoy, carried no arms; but she, too, was sunk.

The fresh haul farther north was almost identical. Thus, the morning's work resulted in the destruction of five dhows, and the capture of 2,000 rifles and some 700 boxes of ammunition. Incidentally, five-and-twenty sorry-looking Afghans, several badly wounded, were provided with accommodation in a Government prison at Karachi later, instead of reaping a rich harvest in the fair fields of Kabul and Herat.

The "cows" had been driven home to their stalls after grazing, milked dry, and granted leisure for chewing the cud of reflection.

A PROTECTION TAX

After the digression made to the operations west of Ras Masandam, with which he was not intimately connected, we now return for a final review of Rahim Dad's movements. It has been shown that it was largely owing to the positive information furnished by that stout knave that the S.N.O. was justified in secretly assembling the greater part of the recently arrived mosquito fleet within the recesses of the Clarence Straits. The *coup* this officer had so skilfully planned to meet the new situation was completely successful; and Rahim Dad is, perhaps, entitled to some of the credit by having acquainted me beforehand with the gun-runners' intentions. Still, as he had not been the direct instrument of this haul of arms falling into our hands, he could not fairly expect further reward on that account; but that was a subject for future discussion.

All this time Rahim Dad, Salih, and one or two other *nakhudas* continued to ply suspiciously between the Persian and Arabian coasts in the Gulf of Oman, carrying merchandise to and fro.

I knew their principal object was to attract the attention of the blockading ships thereabouts, in accordance with Rahim Dad's arrangement with the Afghans. But no hint could I give to the naval authorities to pay little regard to these decoys, without imperilling the disclosure of Rahim Dad's secret compact with me. It does not require experience in an Intelligence Department to convince one that the fewer entrusted with secrets the more likely are they to be kept.

Thus it came about that, not long after the capture of the arms near Qishm, a seemingly familiar skipper and his dhow dropped into the clutches of the naval officer commanding the cruiser which had towed Rahim Dad and the nautch party into Jashk earlier in the season. This officer, it may be remembered, had then intended to permit the dancing-girls to continue on their way unmolested; but as I had on that occasion suggested they should be brought in to Jashk, he thought it advisable to observe a similar procedure now. Although no arms were found aboard the dhow, his suspicions were aroused by the *nakhuda* appearing to court capture, as if in the interests of a third party. The man asserted he knew nothing about the gun-running operations as he had only just arrived from a long sea voyage to Zanzibar and back. He gave his name as Omar Khayyam to the naval officer. When

taxed with being Rahim Dad, he admitted cousinship with that individual, and said he was supposed to resemble him very closely in outward appearance, but averred he was very different otherwise.

Such was the gist of the wireless message I received ; and it seemed desirable in the circumstances for me to take this opportunity of making the acquaintance of Rahim Dad's lifelike cousin. He and his dhow were accordingly towed in to Jashk, and passed over to me for further examination.

On meeting the stranger from Zanzibar, when the steam pinnacle had brought the dhow ashore at Jashk, a single glance sufficed to assure me that its skipper was no other than my old friend Rahim Dad ; but there was such an appeal in his eyes as they caught mine that I decided to respect his incognito in the presence of the naval officer. I agreed that this cousin was certainly the living image of his notorious relative, and was not surprised he had been taken for him. Anyhow, I would thrash the matter out more at my leisure. Meanwhile, *nakhuda* and crew would be lodged in the guard-room. The cruiser then departed to resume her preventive patrol.

When confronted with me later, the supposititious Omar Khayyam—I admired his poetic fancy in pseudonym—cast aside all further attempt at

camouflage. He smiled unrestrainedly on being greeted with "Well, old maker of tents, what's your special grievance now? I imagine you are anxious to have a word with me, or you would scarcely have been captured by the 'marn-i-war' and dragged here under suspicion."

Yes, that was his main idea; he felt he could not just then detach his dhow from her mission by any other means, without creating comment among his confederates. However, in the first place, he wished to express his admiration for the very successful manner in which the capture of Afghans and arms had been effected in the vicinity of Qishm. He, of course, quite understood that he was entitled to no reward on that score. I rejoiced to learn of his moderation.

Proceeding, he said his trouble was that the Daria Begi had issued orders to all Persian subject *nakhudas*, who had received payment from the Afghans during the gun-running season, to submit accounts to him at once of what they had amassed by that means. This declaration was to be accompanied by a sum equal to one-third of that already received, as a *māliāt-i-hifāzat* (Protection Tax)—in the words of the *firman*. Failing compliance, the names of the defaulting *nakhudas* would be handed over to the British authorities for such drastic action as the latter might desire to take against these Persian arms law-breakers!

And Rahim Dad was, of course, one of those who had been served with this notice.

Though sympathizing deeply with our colleague in his dilemma, I was not entirely surprised at the step taken by the new Daria Begi. I had judged him, at our interviews some time earlier, to be the type of Governor eager to seize upon any excuse for surreptitiously making something for himself out of the gun-running operations. The blow had now fallen, and Rahim Dad was obviously not best pleased at the iniquity, as he termed it, of the Persian official entrusted from Teheran with the good government of this outlying portion of the Shah's dominions. He was inclined to rebel, and disregard the demand on his hard-earned gains; but I counselled caution, and advised him to "stump up" lest greater evil might befall him. We could afford him no protection as a subject of the Shah—and a notorious one at that.

That Rahim Dad was pretty certain to "cook" his accounts was no concern of mine. This was a matter entirely between him, his conscience, and the Daria Begi. Still, the fact that he admitted in his return having received 6,000 rupees from the Afghans, in spite of running arms free for them of late, and excluding the commission yet due to him for the Sohar-Sharjah scheme, went to prove the lucrative nature of his calling. Had he not amassed another 3,500 rupees or so from

the British, too ? But the latter item was " secret and confidential," and did not, of course, come under the purview of the Daria Begi's *firman*.

In any case, Rahim Dad seemed to consider that he was doing the Daria Begi extremely proud by responding to his monstrous demand with a sum of 2,000 rupees. To make up this amount he requested the payment of the 1,000 rupees still due to him from me. He then asked my permission to put to sea again, in order to hand over the money in person to the Daria Begi at Bandar Abbas, as directed.

Thus Rahim Dad's account with the British was closed. Before he sailed, however, he again reverted with enthusiasm to the recent operations off Qishm, much about which he had already learnt from other lips. When I suggested that the capture of the Afghans might render remote his chance of ever seeing the colour of his commissions, he chuckled knowingly. He was no fool, he reminded me, and had arranged for a very astute Arab broker at Dibai to look after his interests in the matter. On the departure of the Daria Begi for Bushire, he would drop in at Dibai, and hoped to pocket another 2,000 rupees odd there. His intention then was to " shut up shop " and enjoy his *otium cum dignitate* at Ziarat for the rest of the season.

He had made his peace with the young Baluchis,

who thought that their period of imprisonment at Jashk was well recompensed by the 20 rupees received from him. They had voted him a "jolly good fellow" and lauded to the skies his many other brilliant successes over the "thick-headed Anglez." So spake Rahim Dad. As for the Afghans, we were likely to hear little more of them this year. Few remained on the Arabian side of the Gulf; and those still on Persian soil were making preparations to depart for Afghanistan before the hot weather added to the difficulties of their long journey. All were "as sick as mud," he said, at the result of the year's operations, and vowed vengeance against the British; but he, fortunately, was regarded by them with the utmost good-will.

Matters had been very satisfactorily wound up, therefore; and as I, too, was shortly returning to India, I took this opportunity of bidding good-bye to Rahim Dad. It seemed probable that we should not meet again. My relief as Intelligence Officer during the summer months was to leave Simla in a few days to take over; so it was with genuine regret on both sides—I verily believe—that Rahim Dad and I then parted. He certainly had added to the gaities of guessing, so far as I was concerned, by playing his new part well; and as he had contrived to collect a good many shekels under our ægis, whilst preserving a whole

skin, he was not ungrateful, I should say, to the British.

Some days after his departure from Jashk, strange events apparently began to take place at Bandar Abbas. We were not in direct communication by telegraph or otherwise with that port, but picked up wireless messages of an enigmatical character flying between various blockading ships. All we could gather from these was that serious disturbances had broken out in the neighbourhood of Bandar Abbas; and that the British consul there had applied for a cruiser to stand by in case of necessity until the air cleared a bit. One rather feared that the Afghans might be cutting up rusty, as a final kick at the British before embarking on their toilsome trek to their homes—without the rifles on which they had hoped to derive a big profit. Such an outbreak was well within the bounds of disgruntled and ruined men, as a reprisal for the hideous losses suffered by them this season; so we awaited further details with some anxiety.

It was no little relief, therefore, to learn from a cruiser, which called in at Jashk a day or two later, that the transport carrying the *fauj* had been summoned to the spot. The Afghans were not, after all, implicated in the disturbance. This was directed, not against the British consulate, but against H.E. the Daria Begi himself;

and by the local inhabitants. On arrival at Bandar Abbas, H.E. had taken up his residence in the Governor's house, and proceeded to collect the taxes said to be due to the Persian Government. Never a popular performance among Persians, the bleeding process on this occasion appeared to have been much aggravated by the abnormal demands of the new Daria Begi. Those victimized appealed in vain for justice. The Governor was adamant, and their Oriental patience under oppression then gave way, it seemed.

To the astonishment and dismay of the Governor, Government House was attacked one night by the incensed inhabitants, I was informed, of Bandar Abbas. The attack was with difficulty beaten back by the Governor's guard of *tufangchis*; but he then had the mortification of finding himself, the representative of the Shah, besieged for some days in the viceregal building. Much firing of rifles was indulged in by both sides, but with no great loss to either. Eventually, after a truly Gilbertian exposition of Persian warfare, the Daria Begi opened negotiations for buying off his assailants. Peace was once more proclaimed by H.E. paying out a considerable sum of money—presumably part of what he had squeezed out of Persian and Baluch during his residence.

It is difficult to picture a farce of this nature taking place anywhere outside Persia ; and when made aware of some of the details, my mind immediately turned to my old friend Rahim Dad, bound for Bandar Abbas after our last meeting. I was prepared to wager that he was not altogether innocent of complicity in the outrage, since he felt very sore at having to hand over so large a sum as 2,000 rupees to the Daria Begi. At the same time it was my earnest hope that the old rascal had played his cards with caution ; for to fall into the bad books of H.E. would probably prove fatal to his, and perhaps dull our, future prospects anent gun-running in the Gulf.

I need have suffered no qualms on that score. A day or two before my departure from Jashk for Simla, I was aroused from my midnight slumbers by my chief agent, who whispered, to my surprise, that Rahim Dad was without, and would like once again to bid me good-bye, if I did not resent his intrusion. In truth, I was pleased at the old man's friendly attitude, as thus evinced. There was nothing more to be got out of me now ; and I had really acquired a rough form of affection for the rogue. He, at least, had never let me down after vowing eternal gratitude for being permitted to work out his salvation on the British side. I felt, too, there was something yet to learn regarding recent events at Bandar Abbas ;

so I bade my agent tell the old schemer I would gladly see him.

Without any conceit, I fancied I detected an air of depression in Rahim Dad's demeanour when ushered into my apartment to make his farewell bow ; so, to turn his thoughts into more cheerful channels for the moment, I began by congratulating him on having recovered some of the 2,000 rupees he had been forced to pay over to the Daria Begi.

Although apparently astonished at my assumption, his responsive smile assured me I had hit the right nail on the head ; so I proceeded to address him a homily on the desirability of remaining on good terms with the Governor of the Gulf ports, in his own future interests. I closed with the hope that he had been guilty of no rash remonstrance when tendering to H.E. the tax demanded from him.

"On the contrary, sahib," replied Rahim Dad, "the Daria Begi greeted me in a very friendly manner, and praised me highly for the many successful landings he heard I had made for the Afghans this season. To my sorrow, though, sahib, he told me that you were much angered by my humble efforts ; and that your honour had begged him to cast me into prison when next I fell into his hands."

"Now, Rahim Dad," interrupted I, "you are

no fool, as you often tell me, so know as well as I do that I was rendering you the best service I could by holding forth on your past iniquities. Would you have been thus welcomed by the Daria Begi had I told him you were now a real friend of the British ? ”

“ True, sahib ; I was but jesting. The wisdom of the British far surpasses that of us poor seafaring men ; but it cost me 2,000 rupees of my hardly-earned gains, for a time, to win the good opinion of the Daria Begi. Yet was he pleased when I handed over my account and all that sum in silver, humbly praying that another year I might have still more to present to him, if it should please Allah ! His honour re-echoed my *inshallah* very heartily ; but accepted my offering kindly, inquiring what I now proposed to do, as few Afghans remained about Masqat. I replied that now must I return with speed to Ziarat, for I feared greatly to do aught else this year.”

“ And there is no need to tell me,” I chimed in, “ that you had no intention of returning to Ziarat at all, until you had recovered the sum due to you from the Arab broker at Dibai. How did you manage that without rousing the suspicion of the Daria Begi ? ”

“ Well, sahib, the truth is that we *nakhudas*, and many of the town people of Bandar Abbas

besides, bore the Daria Begi no love for the taxes he had unjustly taken from us. It was arranged with Laris from outside, therefore, that they should attack H.E. when he had collected much of what he robbed from us humble ones. The Laris are a brave, well-armed people, sahib, and ever ready to fight the Shah's soldiers if paid for it. In the name of Allah ! it would have warmed your honour's heart to see the Daria Begi besieged in the Government House, and calling on the good loyal citizens of Bandar Abbas to come to his aid.

"Loyal citizens, indeed !" repeated my narrator with scornful emphasis. "Did he think we were dogs that we should rush to lick the hand which had beaten us without mercy ? Ah, well, it was a fine *jang* (war), and the country round was much disturbed ; but we carried no arms, so how could we help the Daria Begi ? Wherefore we remained frightened within the houses of the town ; and before the Laris consented to leave the Daria Begi in peace they demanded a large ransom from him, to be paid over at once. Of this ransom I received but 1,000 rupees, sahib !

"Yet was it a great *tamasha*. Allah grant that the Daria Begi will not quickly forget his collection of taxes at Bandar Abbas ! Protection Tax ! I spit upon it. We *nakhudas* have still to learn that truth and honesty abide in this man. Is

it not passing strange, sahib, that he who proclaimeth himself Protector of the Poor is not able to protect himself against the wrath of them he treadeth under foot ? Often it is thus in our poor country.”

The old sea-dog was lost in silent reverie for some moments. At length he continued : “ When again free, the Daria Begi steamed hastily away for Bushire ; and then did I sail for Dibai to gather the money due to me from the Afghans also. Thus no longer am I a poor *nakhuda*, sahib, and can live at my ease until your honour returns to Jashk next year ; but sore am I at heart that you depart hence.”

“ Well, Rahim Dad, it comforteth me much that I do not leave you in want, and that you have settled all matters satisfactorily with your own people, the Afghans, and the Daria Begi. Your work for the British is known only to us three sitting here ; and when I am gone see to it that you do not try to deceive B—— (my chief agent), who remaineth, and cause him to bring some evil action of thine before my successor. The new sahib arrives to-morrow. I sail by ‘ marn-i-war ’ the day after for Masqat, and thence for Hindustan. Time passes swiftly, so now we must part. Peace be upon you ! ”

With a fervent “ Unto you be peace ! ” in reply and a more than hearty grip of my outstretched

hand in his two horny ones, the old man turned, stepped slowly, almost sadly, towards the door, and vanished into the darkness without. I never saw him again.

RIFLE THIEVES OF IRAQ

I

A few years ago the British public were not a little perturbed by the widespread Arab revolt in Mesopotamia. This assumed such threatening proportions that strong reinforcements had to be hastily dispatched from India, almost at the hottest time of the year, in order to suppress the outbreak and restore tranquillity in those disturbed regions. When order was finally restored throughout the areas affected, the large number of rifles announced as surrendered by the revolting tribes probably came rather as an eye-opener to those who had but vague ideas as to how well-armed the Arabs of Mesopotamia were, at the time of the recent upheaval. For this great accession of strength in the matter of modern arms the Arabs of Iraq were largely indebted to the operations of the Great War on the Tigris and Euphrates. Nations of alien races were there struggling for supremacy for four long-drawn-out years; and though the Arab had no love for Turkish dominion, and was professedly pleased to be relieved, by

degrees, of the paralysing yoke of the Sublime Porte, yet he certainly bore no deep affection for his supposed saviours, the British. Nevertheless, being an astute Oriental, the Arab contrived for long to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. He accordingly threw in his lot, with apparently most cheerful abandon, with whichever side he thought at the moment would ultimately prove top-dog in the swaying fortunes of war. All he then desired was to benefit himself to the utmost possible extent by making full use of such opportunities as came his way owing to the presence of large British and Turkish armies fighting on his beloved soil.

I propose, however, in this article to confine myself merely to one aspect of how the Arab sought to derive balm in Gilead whilst his country was distraught by the clash of arms between foreign foes. As hinted above, these were by no means welcome to the ancient dwellers of Mesopotamia, whose boasted independence, for the time being at all events, was somewhat submerged by the requirements of the contending armies in their midst. Still, hundreds of thousands of breech-loading magazine-rifles, and thousands of tons of small-bore ammunition, were introduced into the country by the chief combatants on Tigris and Euphrates. Here, then, was a heaven-sent opportunity for the acquisition of large numbers

of these coveted possessions by those daring and cunning enough to risk their lives in securing them by stealth.

Being cosmopolitan in their sympathies, the Arabs endeavoured to rob rifles indiscriminately from British and Turk alike. The largest hauls of British rifles were probably made on the bloody battlefields preceding the fall of Kut in 1916. The din of conflict never failed to attract Arab horsemen and scavengers, who, though perhaps until then unseen, gathered from the four corners of the limitless desert like evil beasts of prey. As vultures waiting for their victims to breathe their last, so would these human carrion hover on the outskirts of the battle until the darkness of night temporarily stayed the strife. Then, with consummate daring, would they often penetrate between the lines of the contending forces, to appropriate the rifles and ammunition of those who had fallen, and had not yet been removed to safety from the zone of fire. Not a few wounded, it is feared, whilst lying out in the rain and mud which so frequently followed upon an engagement on a large scale before Kut, must have suffered grievously at the hands of those pitiless wretches. The clearing-up of battlefields was accompanied by no small risk, as the search- and stretcher-parties engaged on their painful tasks would encounter Arabs at almost every turn, and with

difficulty drive them off from their fiendish occupation.

When the day was lost and the Turks were in full flight after the battle of Nasirieh on the Euphrates in 1915, their Arab levies immediately turned on them and joined in the pursuit of the beaten enemy. Thousands of Turkish rifles were probably captured by the Arabs during those days, and hundreds of the scattered Turks slaughtered by their quondam allies. What the Turkish losses in rifles and men were at the hands of Arabs throughout their retreat from Kut to Baghdad, early in 1917, will probably never be known; but they must have been considerable, as the Turks taken by us were overjoyed at being made prisoners. This they far preferred to falling victims to guerilla bands of Arabs following close in their wake.

I have suggested that scant mercy was likely to be shown to any combatant who unhappily fell into the hands of Arab marauders during or after an engagement in Iraq; and though instances occur to my mind of how British and Indian wounded sometimes fared on such occasions, I refrain from enlarging on this painful subject. But it was not only to the living the riverain Arab frequently showed himself to be without pity or remorse, for even the dead and buried were not allowed to rest in peace. So general in course of time became the practice of the Arabs—men,

women, and children—to disinter the dead, in the hope of securing an old pair of ammunition boots, blanket, jersey, or any other blood-saturated garment, that finally all traces of the burying-places adjacent to the battlefields had to be carefully obliterated, in order to conceal their positions from the ghoulish inhabitants of this accursed country.

The Arab, as is commonly known, is a good judge and devout lover of the horse as well as of a trusty rifle; and, to give the devil his due, his courage and cunning in abstracting chargers from almost under the eyes of alert sentries stamp him as a real artist in the matter of horse-stealing. In the earlier days of the extended operations before Kut, the flank of the force distributed for miles along the right bank of the Tigris, up-stream of Shaikh Sa'ad, was exposed to incursions by Arabs from the plains to the south. On dark nights, and in inclement weather, it was not difficult for Arab thieves to penetrate outer lines of sentries, and worm their way into the precincts of various camps in this area where horses and rifles were known to be plentiful. The theft of rifles under such circumstances, though requiring great nerve and discrimination, might be regarded as comparatively simple to those expert thieves; but the silent removal of several valuable chargers at one fell swoop from a sleeping camp, through

inner and outer lines of sentries, betokens skill of an exceptional order. And yet this feat was accomplished again and again without any one being the wiser, until daylight revealed the loss. The only explanation the sentries on duty over the horses could then give was probably to the effect that, hearing a disturbance in the mule lines near by, say, their attention had been temporarily distracted in that direction; but they had not seen nor heard any movement among the horses committed to their charge. Still, several of these were gone; and neither inner nor outer cordon of sentries had noticed anything suspicious, or challenged anyone, throughout the vigils of the night. In this manner it was that the distinguished general conducting the operations during the attempt to relieve Kut in April, 1916, was victimized, among many others, by Arab horse-thieves. The success of such enterprises, therefore, clearly denotes most careful previous reconnaissance and location of sentries; an amazing knowledge of, or influence over, horses, which thus untethered at night silently followed a complete stranger without demur; and the uncanny ability of that stranger to see by night almost as well as by day; not to mention cold calculated courage of an unusual type in the midst of hidden dangers.

The summer of 1916 was a particularly trying one to the troops before Kut. It is no secret that

the *moral* of the British forces during that hot weather was far from high. Not only had very heavy losses been incurred during the first four months of the year in our efforts to succour Townshend and his ten thousand locked up in Kut, but all these sacrifices had been in vain, for Kut had surrendered to the Turk before the end of April. This alone was a depressing reflection to those who had done their utmost to extricate the beleaguered garrison; but the proper maintenance of the British army in its advanced position subsequently became a problem of the greatest difficulty during that fell season of the year. Much sickness resulted from the inadequate means at our disposal to keep the troops well supplied with fresh vegetables and other nutritious foods; for the peculiar situation on the Tigris made it impossible to get river steamers up much beyond Shaikh Sa'ad, which became the advanced base of our army. The Turks on the left bank of the Tigris still held on to their strongly-entrenched position about Sannaiyat, some 17 or 18 miles north-west of Shaikh Sa'ad in a direct line, though half as much again by river. Here their right flank on that bank rested on the river, whilst their left rested on the great Suwaicha marsh, which extended many miles to the north. On the right bank of the river, however, the Turks surreptitiously withdrew from their dominating,

forward positions covering the approaches to Kut from the east, where they had successfully held our forces at bay until Kut fell. They, too, apparently had found the difficulties of maintenance beyond their compass; and, anticipating no further active operations during the heat of the summer months, they abandoned all positions as far back as, and beyond, the Dujailah Redoubt, which we had failed to capture by a surprise attack early in March. The enemy now occupied a strongly-entrenched position in rear across the angle formed by the rivers Tigris and Hai, only a few miles east and south of Kut. His new flank on the right bank of the Tigris was thus some 12 or 15 miles up-stream of the narrow front held by him at Sannaiyat on the left bank. But the entire left bank throughout this intervening space bristled with trenches, machine-guns, and redoubts to oppose any attempt at a crossing from the right bank of the river, which here averaged about a quarter of a mile in width. When it was realized what the Turk had done, the British commander immediately pushed forward his troops and occupied the Dujailah and other redoubts. And these served subsequently as the jumping-off place for the very successful operations conducted by General Maude in the following winter.

The farther advance of our line to this forward

position, however, unquestionably aggravated the difficulties of supply ; for the distance in a direct line—avoiding the great north-westerly bend of the Tigris hereabouts—across the desert from the large depot being formed at Shaikh Sa'ad to Dujailah had been increased to some 25 miles. Intermediate strong points had to be established along the desert route, and water conveyed to them from the Tigris—in several cases 8 to 10 miles distant ; whilst mule-cart and camel convoys plied incessantly between the various depots and the troops in the forward area. There were no roads, and the surface of the alluvial plain, now as dry as a bone, quickly became disintegrated into powder several inches thick along the frequented tracks. Owing to the great heat, and scarcity of water by these inland routes, the convoys were obliged to move by night, when visibility was still further reduced by reason of haze and the clouds of dust raised by the weary transport. Arab horsemen from the south, familiarly known as “ Buddoos,” were not slow to take advantage of these favourable conditions for swooping down out of the darkness, stampeding convoys, and securing rifles and other loot from those who had been surprised. It was a nerve-racking experience for ill-fed and sickly troops employed on convoy work.

Nor was any relief obtained from such experi-

ences until the light two-feet gauge railway across the desert was well under way from the defensive perimeter constructed round the advanced base about Shaikh Sa'ad. Then, as the railway was pushed steadily forward towards Dujailah and the Hai river, a line of low-command octagonal block-houses sprang up in the desert between the puny railway and the boundless prairies to the south. They were excavated in the earth every 500 or 600 yards apart, and connected with each other by barbed-wire entanglements. These formed a salient about midway between each block-house, the respective rays being flanked by rifle-fire from the adjacent block-house whence they emanated. And in each of these cosy underground habitations some ten N.C.O.'s and men dwelt and had their being, for weeks at a time—until relieved by their own or another unit. Block-house duty was essentially a popular one. There were no long and trying marches for these cave-dwellers. Rations and water were drawn regularly from points on the railway immediately in their rear. By day one sentry in each block-house was sufficient to keep a watchful eye on the dead level, open plains stretching away to the south; whilst his pals kicked about a football, or took on a neighbouring block-house team, within the secure boundaries of the stout barbed-wire fencing between them and the generally invisible enemy.

Occasionally a band of Arab horsemen might be detected prowling about outside in the haze, or reflected in the wonderful mirages so prevalent over these plains. But after the exciting experience of drawing fire from the alert block-house garrisons, they soon came to the conclusion that, by day at all events, it were wise to keep a respectful distance from this barbed-wire fence. The block-houses were designed to be inconspicuous. Each face of the octagonal trench was only 15 feet in length, and the parapet 2 feet 6 inches above ground-level; whilst the roof of the underground dwelling-place within this enclosure did not protrude above the parapet walls around it. Two thousand yards off they were not discernible by day; and as the barbed-wire fence of South African triangular type—with central strands up to 5 feet in height, and front and back aprons aggregating 10 to 12 feet wide at the base—was not readily distinguishable either at that distance, Arabs were at first caught unawares, by approaching casually within long-range rifle-fire of the block-houses. They gradually bought their experience.

On dark nights the position was entirely reversed. Despite the vigilance of block-house sentries, there was little now to prevent cat-like Arabs crawling cautiously up to the wire somewhere near a salient, distant perhaps 250 to 300 yards from the nearest

block-house. After cutting several lower strands of wire, and creeping within the sacred portals of the defensive line, they were free to commit considerable thefts in the huge area thus open to them, and make their exit in a similar manner with their booty. By this time the Arabs were well supplied with wire-cutters, picked up on battlefields and elsewhere; and it was comparatively easy for these determined men to elude the occasional patrols between one block-house and the next, and to get clear away before daylight. Indeed, on several occasions these sportsmen abstracted camels and mules, as well as rifles, through the barbed-wire fencing by night. They performed their job neatly. No half-measures on such trips, for they boldly cut away an entire bay of barbed wire between two posts supporting it, spaced some 15 feet apart. Through the wide gap thus created they just led the animals, mounted them the other side, and disappeared into the darkness. One waggish party, presumably to show their contempt, carefully replaced the bay before taking their departure. The horizontals and aprons of wire had all been cut near one post, and swung back to permit of the exit of the animals, and then roughly done up again. The joke was easily detected when the block-house garrisons made the usual inspection of their rays of fencing next morning.

But in reality these nocturnal depredations were by no means a laughing matter, though one could not help appreciating the cool courage of the marauders. If the barbed-wire fencing was to be a real protection to the railway in rear, and the various scattered camps and depots existing between it and the River Tigris away to the north, the block-house line must be rendered tolerably inviolate. Hence, additional devices were brought into use to aid the block-house garrisons in their anxious tasks by night. Spring-guns were tried. These were set up in the barbed-wire enclosure surrounding each block-house, and fixed about 18 inches above ground-level. They were aimed to sweep the entire length of the barbed-wire ray from block-house to salient. A thin plain wire ran from the hair-trigger to the salient, and was held up at intervals by wire depending from the outer apron of the fence. The theory was that anyone attempting to crawl through the entanglement would immediately jerk the wire connected with the rifle, and receive a bullet in his body for his trouble before he could say "Knife!" But this device did not prove altogether a success, though I believe one or two pi-dogs had some hair-raising escapes, and created alarms whilst nosing about the fence.

At length a genius evolved a home-made microphone out of a discarded jam tin and a spiral of

wire wound by him originally round a pencil. The spiral was let into the jam tin by a small hole in the centre of the bottom and the straight end outside connected with thin plain wire, which, like that of the spring-gun, ran the entire length of the ray from block-house to salient. Any tampering with the barbed-wire entanglement caused violent vibrations to take place within the jam tin, and thus warned the listener that there was dirty work going on somewhere in that length of fencing. There were always two sentries on duty by night in the block-house, each being responsible for one length of fence radiating from the block-house. Each block-house was therefore supplied with two microphones, set up in the parapet close to the respective sentry's stand. That more or less fixed up the matter of information. For action, old wooden boxes, minus their tops, were firmly secured into the parapet, and their ends and sides grooved in such a way that they readily took, and held in position, the long .303 rifle. This was automatically trained, by the fixed position of the box, to sweep the ground to the salient on a low alignment midway between the toe of the outer apron and the posts of the fencing. All the sentry had to do at night, then, if he judged the microphone had spotted somebody or something along his special length of fence, was to put his rifle rapidly into the grooved box

and pull the trigger. The bullet did the rest. If it didn't down the intruder, it would give him the fright of his life, in missing him by only a hair's-breadth whilst he was entangled in the wire a couple of hundred yards or so from the block-house.

Soon after we had got these primitive aids to nature set going along the block-house line, and around the great depot at Shaikh Sa'ad, I was anxious to ascertain what success was attending our efforts to keep Arab thieves at bay near the front. On this particular occasion I was inspecting the Shaikh Sa'ad defences, organized on the lines sketched above by means of block-houses and wire-fencing several miles in length. These enclosed a great bend of the river, within which area the advanced base had now assumed imposing proportions. The colonel of the unit which was responsible for the defence of the Shaikh Sa'ad perimeter waxed enthusiastic over the arrangements devised, so I asked for further details of his successes. I was not a little amused to receive the reply, "Well, sir, during the last week we have bagged a Buddoo, a jackal, and an owl, thanks to the microphone and rifle-rests." To this day I have failed to fathom why an owl should have been fool enough to mix himself up with a barbed-wire entanglement in the dark. He could hardly have expected to find mice playing about on it.

On the whole, we had to rest satisfied with home manufactured articles, for "Mesopotamia" was ever starved in the matter of mechanical contrivances, so we did the best we could with rough materials at hand. The Arab had now been largely scotched along the railway area; but he still managed at intervals to perpetrate daring thefts by penetrating the block-house line. This before long had reached a distance of 25 miles from Shaikh Sa'ad; and at the time of the recapture of Kut in February, 1917, the railway and block-houses had been extended another 5 or 6 miles to the Hai, as soon as the Turk had been expelled from his bridgehead on that river. It was inevitable on so long a route that numerous irrigation channels, leading from the Tigris into the interior, should have to be crossed both by the railway and block-house line. These were the weak points in the defensive line, for it was not always possible to sweep with fire the bottoms of these channels from the block-houses, and the vital necessity of economizing troops prohibited the employment of further detachments to watch them by night. This dead ground in the vicinity of block-houses proved, therefore, a troublesome factor, for the Arab was quick to detect any weakness in our lineal defences. Ultimately we resorted to placing hidden bombs, ready to go off at the slightest touch, amid the tangle of barbed wire

in these depressions. But it was a tricky business, and I was always expecting to hear of some of my command being hoist by their own petard, despite the work being entrusted to bombing specialists alone. Happily, we suffered no serious accidents in this connection, but I cannot truthfully say that the Arab suffered many casualties either. The beggars must have smelt these bombs in the dark, and avoided them like the plague. He's no fool is the Arab thief, and does not often make mistakes. So he ceased for a time from troubling near the front, and the weary obtained some rest from his nocturnal attentions. A jackal or two, though, bit the dust at the hands of these bombs. There was not much left of such explorers after close contact with a Mill's bomb. They were unable therefore to warn their friends, and we scarcely got our money's worth for expenditure of bomb, one, Mill's, per "jack."

For a while we flattered ourselves the Arab was up against something that caused him to scratch his head and think a bit. But when the crossing of the Tigris at Shamran was so gallantly accomplished, and the Turk was in full flight towards Baghdad, hotly pursued by the victorious army, the difficulties of those left behind to clear up the hundreds of dumps, small and large, scattered over miles of country on both banks of the river about Kut, constituted no joy-ride. It was scarcely

realized by G.H.Q. in the hurry of framing orders for, and carrying out, the pursuit, what immense quantities of stuff required collecting and transporting to places of safety on the river banks from far afield. Consequently, inadequate arrangements were made for the performance of this big task, which occupied several weeks. Thus numerous opportunities were presented to large bodies of well-armed Arab marauders from Hai town and the surrounding country to load themselves heavily with Turkish rifles, ammunition, and many other articles of a lethal nature. These had been abandoned, or left but weakly guarded, outside the zone between Shaikh Sa'ad and the Hai river covered by the block-house line on the right bank. Small isolated parties of our troops in the exposed area had an anxious time of it, perched in the blue alongside numerous artillery and other dumps, surrounded as they were by hordes of Arabs bent on securing loot of any description.

The British were indubitably top-dogs now, as the Turk was on the run ; but in the state of confusion existing in rear, due to the rapid advance of our troops from the trenches and positions held by them—in some cases for close on a year—the Arab cared little who had been worsted so long as he derived benefit from what had been left behind. The entire country around Kut, on both banks of the river, had for the past two years

been in a thoroughly disturbed state, so it was some time before the Arab realized that the Turk was gone for good, and it was possible for the British to restore tranquillity and order in the turbulent district. Consequently, the gradual location and collection of the scattered dumps to newly-formed defensive posts on the Tigris, by the small numbers detailed for this purpose, was a harassing business, and it is surprising that no serious losses in personnel resulted.

At length, when all the dumps on the right bank had been conveyed to safety, orders were issued for rolling up the railway and block-house line from the Hai to Shaikh Sa'ad. Then the fun increased. The Arabs quickly perceived what was afoot, and before long it was computed that 1,500 to 2,000 horsemen were out to gather in all they could during the process. But we were prepared for this; and the orders I gave to the officer entrusted with the task were to the effect that, when the existing Hai river line between the railway terminus on that stream and the Tigris was abandoned, fresh rearward northern fronts must be established every few days between the railway and the Tigris, in order to prevent the Arabs getting round behind whilst the railway and block-houses were demolished section by section from the front. The work was rapidly and efficiently carried out, and the Arabs failed to break in anywhere along

the new northerly fronts, which were sometimes close on 8 miles in length between the varying terminals of the block-house line and the Tigris. A force of all arms from the line of communication troops was placed at the disposal of the officer, and the guns and cavalry found plenty of scope for dispersing the more threatening bands of marauders. These derived little from their temerity; for all rails, sleepers, timber, barbed wire, wooden posts, corrugated iron, etc., utilized for the 30 odd miles of railway and block-house line, were continuously loaded up on trains and conveyed back to the shelter of the Shaikh Sa'ad perimeter as the work of demolition progressed. Nothing of use was left behind. It was a fine piece of work, reflecting the greatest credit on all concerned. The entire line was soon safely rolled up to Shaikh Sa'ad. Not a rifle or horse was lost; and the officer in charge of the operation was deservedly rewarded in the next Honours List published.

During the subsequent campaigns of the British in Mesopotamia, up to the time of the Armistice, comparatively little trouble was experienced at the hands of Arab marauders in the northern course of the Tigris. Apart from the sobering effect the capture of Baghdad had on the inhabitants of that region, I should judge that the Arabs of those districts are neither such persistent nor such skilled rifle thieves as those south of Kut. At all events,

I have visited corps headquarters and brigade camps, away to the north of Baghdad, which, had they been similarly protected in the Amarah area, for example, would soon have been cleared out of all they contained. Still, rifle thieves are not entirely inactive thereabouts, as I learnt from experience when in command of the huge Assyrian Refugee Camp at Baqubah, on the Diala river north-north-east of Baghdad, from October, 1918, to June, 1919.

II

In the previous chapter I have endeavoured to portray conditions imposed on us, largely by reason of the activity of Arab marauders, in the forward areas about Kut. Matters along the Tigris line of communication were not one whit better, with respect to rifle-thieving by gentry of the same kidney. In point of fact, the country round Amarah—130 miles up-stream of Basrah, and roughly midway between Basrah and Kut—continued to be a happy hunting-ground for rifle thieves long after Baghdad was captured by the British. Despite the entire 500 miles of river line between Basrah and Baghdad being ultimately held by a series of marching-posts and mobile column centres, one was never free in the Amarah area from the persistent attempts of Arabs to secure rifles during 1916, 1917, and 1918.

A combination of uncontrollable circumstances was chiefly responsible for this centre being the permanent resort of Arabs of bad character. In the first place, vast areas of swamp on both banks of the river afforded secure retreats, inaccessible to us but close at hand, whither ill-gotten booty could be speedily removed by the thieves. The district was divided into numerous inextricably mixed-up estates, each ruled over by a separate sheikh; and it was wellnigh impossible, therefore, to hold any particular chieftain responsible for the various thefts committed. When a thief was caught red-handed, or killed in his attempt to steal, no Arab could be found to recognize the culprit or corpse as having dwelt on any neighbouring estate. He, or it, was always a profound stranger to all the sheikhs around, who would piously protest that the "vile miscreant" must have come from some remote region of the Hai or Euphrates. No one had ever seen him before. The daring rogue had apparently never partaken of food or hospitality in any of the adjacent villages or encampments during his sojourn in the Amarah district. He had come, and been taken, like the thief he was, in the night. They were certainly loyal to each other, these fluent liars, and never gave each other away. Even when a captured thief was tried, convicted, and condemned to be hanged, no outward regret was expressed by any-

one. No friend or relative ever asked permission to console him during his last days on earth ; nor would the condemned man disclose anything about himself or his accomplices.

The gallows, in the hot weather of 1916, was erected in the then open square on the left bank of the river, at the north-west corner of Amarah town. The inhabitants were summoned to witness such executions, which, it was hoped, would serve as a deterrent to potential rifle thieves present. Probably the most unconcerned individual of the whole throng in the grim drama was the chief actor in it. He was seemingly far less affected than his escort of sepoys and the executioner, and never displayed the least emotion when ordered to ascend the scaffold, or during the adjustment of the noose. Kismet, his fate had been thus ordained. A few seconds later his soul had fled, and Amarah was rid of one more rifle thief. But plenty of others continued to embark on the perilous adventure during the ensuing years.

The hot weather and autumn succeeding the fall of Kut was, perhaps, the time when Amarah was least well prepared to deal with rifle thieves. Turkish emissaries frequently gained admission to this populous district on the Tigris, by various routes and in skilful disguises ; and the inhabitants were led to believe, therefore, that the Turk would soon be returning in overwhelming strength, now

that Townshend and his force had been removed from Kut. Then, woe betide any Arab sheikh who had afforded assistance to the British during their temporary occupation of this region. Consequently, the general attitude of the bigger men was a strictly non-committal one; and those living in and about Amarah spent the languid hours of the tedious days smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee in the numerous cafés of the bazaar and on the river front, and took no part in the invading army's activities in this rapidly-expanding emporium.

Next to the growth of Basrah at this time, that of Amarah easily ranked second along the Tigris. Great hospitals, British and Indian, were formed for the reception and treatment of 6,000 sick and wounded. Large British and Indian convalescent depots likewise came into being. Sites had to be provided for important river-steamer workshops, electric-light installations, ice factories, and a railway terminus for the Basrah-Amarah metre-gauge railway, then in course of construction. Those responsible for the formation of coal and oil depots, huge supply dumps, ordnance yards, remount depots, large transport lines, and dozens of requirements besides, clamoured for accommodation along the banks of the river. And every one desired protection from active Arab thieves.

The existing defence arrangements at Amarah were distinctly out of date in the early days of the hot weather of 1916 ; but it was futile to embark on final schemes until the complete requirements there were approximately decided upon by G.H.Q. This, naturally, could not be settled in a day, a week, or a month, owing to the ever-changing conditions ; and it may be imagined, therefore, that a pretty lively interchange of compliments between sentries and rifle thieves occurred meanwhile, almost nightly. Often on oppressive evenings, whilst seated after dinner with my staff on the roof of Tigris Defence Headquarters, would we be treated to the sound of regular fusillades on the right bank amid the palm groves immediately facing us. Many thieves got away with their booty in those days, a few were killed outright, and others captured, and subsequently hanged ; but our troops did not always emerge scot-free, for several were knifed or wounded by pistols at this period. Indeed, one poor British N.C.O., attached to the Officers' Convalescent Depot amid the palms, was discovered lying dead on a *charpoy* one morning with his throat cut. Finding the heat of his hut unbearable that night, he had dragged his native bedstead out into the open alongside his quarters, and was presumably murdered whilst asleep by some Arab assassins. Sleeping in the open, except on the roof

of a house, lost many of its attractions thereafter.

Amarah, too, was an important halting-place for numerous échelons of all arms moving up by road from Basrah to the forward areas; and it gradually developed also into one of the main training centres in Mesopotamia. Here were established a machine-gun school, bombing classes, rifle-ranges, physical-training and bayonet-exercise classes, and other institutions for the purpose of instruction. Additional opportunities were thus afforded to rifle thieves for carrying on their nefarious trade; and the sound of musketry-fire by sentries at night on both banks of the river grew in volume. The British division at the front began to arrive at Amarah from Shaikh Sa'ad early in September, 1916, for two months' intensive training, on the expiry of which they were to take part in General Maude's projected offensive against the Turks. They were followed the whole way down by gangs of rifle thieves, and few échelons of the division could boast that they had not lost rifles during their 100-miles march down-stream. The efforts of these thieves were persisted in, practically without cessation, throughout the period the division was in standing camp on the left bank of the Tigris a couple of miles or so above Amarah town. One medical officer was killed by a bullet whilst in bed, and several men were wounded by

thieves whilst endeavouring to capture these elusive pests in their midst. What the total losses suffered by the division in rifles were I am unable to state ; but it is quite certain that these, combined with the wear and tear on the sentries' nerves at night, were not inappreciable.

In course of time the theft of rifles in Iraq became such a serious matter that stringent orders were issued by G.H.Q. on the subject. If the Court of Inquiry were of opinion the man robbed had been guilty of carelessness regarding the safety of his rifle, he not only had to pay the value of the weapon—Rs.58—but was to be tried by court-martial. Every man who lost his rifle was fined the Rs.58, whether he was careless or not, unless there were peculiarly extenuating circumstances, which was rarely admitted. It was about time, for the casual disregard by some individuals of the warnings issued at Basrah to new-comers in the country of the prevalence of rifle-thieving was little less than criminal. For the first few marches out of Basrah all would probably go quite well. No sign of a rifle thief would disturb the serenity of the night's rest after a tiring march, immediately following, perhaps, weeks on board ship. Immunity so far would possibly lead to contempt, and vigilance would gradually become relaxed day by day on the march up-country. Then, hey, presto! the éche-

lon wakes one morning to learn that ten or a dozen of the men are unable to find their rifles in their respective tents. Nor will they ever find them elsewhere, for they are gone for good by now, secreted probably in a *bellum* or dug-out canoe sheltering amidst the cane and reeds of the adjacent swamp country, and quite inaccessible to the disillusioned troops.

It was an oft-repeated story, and truth compels the statement that by far the greater percentage of those victimized were British troops, generally those newly landed from overseas. Rifle thieves were a novel experience to these raw recruits, who were easily outwitted by the cunning Arab. The Indian sepoy, especially those who had spent much of their service in the Punjab and along the North-west Frontier, had been initiated into the wiles of Pathan rifle thieves, probably from the first day they joined their units. They were accustomed therefore to be ever on the alert, and never to omit precautionary measures ensuring the safety of their valued rifles by day or night. But they too were frequently robbed.

It was comparatively seldom that the Arabs resorted to violence in order to obtain rifles. In the large majority of cases the sleeper was not awakened by forcible efforts on the part of the thief to detach a rifle secured by its sling, or fastened by other means, to the person of the unconscious

slumberer. Much experience and knowledge of the subject led these Arabs to recognize, almost unerringly, which rifles could be safely abstracted without arousing their owners, and which had better be left severely alone. The last thing they desired on such occasions was to raise an alarm in camp, for this would inevitably militate against their silent withdrawal with their booty from the various tents, and an unobserved exit from the camp through the surrounding line of sentries. Still, there were exceptions to the general rule, and sentries were occasionally shot by rifle thieves, and men knifed in their tents if they awoke suddenly and attempted to seize an unusually clumsy performer, who had, perchance, bungled his job and aroused the peaceful slumberer.

There is no doubt these nocturnal visitations, when at their worst, constituted a decided strain on the faculties of sentries, and on the peace of mind generally of conscientious men who were anxious about the safety of their arms, and were supposed to find rest at night under the sheltering care of those sentries. Something had to be done, therefore, to reduce the risks to a minimum. Hence, not only was the garrison of every marching-post and mobile column centre on the line of communication securely ensconced behind parapet walls and barbed-wire enclosure flanked therefrom, but the areas immediately adjoining them, set

aside for the use of marching échelons, were likewise surrounded by stout barbed-wire fencing, flanked to a large extent from the permanently occupied post.

In the earlier portion of this article I have referred to the Shaikh Sa'ad defensive perimeter of block-houses and barbed wire being several miles in length— $3\frac{1}{4}$ to be exact; but that was a simple proposition compared with the problem of dealing with Arab thieves in the now greatly expanded Amarah area. This was not only due to the more active efforts of rifle thieves in the Amarah district, for the reasons already given, but the eccentricities of the Tigris hereabouts enhanced the difficulties of the situation. The town of Amarah is situated on the east or left bank of the Tigris, and contained a population of some 15,000 souls, dwelling chiefly in sun-dried brick houses. For several miles above the town the Tigris flows in an easterly direction, but swings sharply to the south immediately above the town; whilst an important branch of the Tigris, known as the Chahalal, which carries almost as big a volume of water as the main stream, flows out of the river in an easterly direction at this bend. Little over a mile down-stream the Chahalal divides into two, the more northern offtake, termed the Masharreh Canal, still continuing in an easterly direction, and the main

branch turning away to the south-east. Both empty themselves ultimately into large expanses of marsh, the abode of amphibious marsh Arabs.

Here, then, were four considerable waterways penetrating the required defensive area around Amarah—i.e. the Tigris above the town; the Tigris alongside and below the town; and the Chahalah and Masharreh Canals. In order to prevent entrance to Arab rifle thieves, the defensive line of barbed wire and block-houses had, consequently, to be divided into four sections. The great angle of the Tigris on the right bank was enclosed to form one section, within which were the railway terminus, huge supply yards, various British and Indian hospitals, convalescent depots, inland water transport repair shops, and so on, not forgetting the Amarah race-course and polo-ground. The area between the left bank of the Tigris and the right bank of the Chahalah comprised the second section, and enclosed the whole town of Amarah, and a large area of brickfields and kilns to the south of it, utilized for the original construction of the town. The third section, between the left bank of the Chahalah and the right bank of the Masharreh, enclosed animal transport lines, isolation hospitals for infectious cases, etc.; whilst the fourth section, enclosing remount and mechanical transport depots, dairy,

additional supply yards, échelon camps, etc., extended from the left bank of the Masharreh to a point on the left bank of the Tigris opposite the river redoubt of the right bank perimeter—about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles up-stream of the Chahalal-Tigris parting. In all we were committed to the nightly occupation of some eight miles of block-houses and barbed-wire fencing round Amarah, mainly with a view to frustrating the incessant designs of Arab rifle thieves. And I for one most cordially wished these persistent rogues at Jericho, and further, as the demands on the line of communication garrison and mobile column here admitted of the troops having only a very few nights in bed.

Thereafter the activities of rifle thieves were considerably restricted, but by no means entirely quashed; for the wide waterways still afforded means for these gentry to float silently down-stream in their *bellums* on dark boisterous nights, land at isolated spots on one bank or another, perpetrate various thefts, remove their limited booty to their *bellums*, and to continue down-stream through the southern limits of the defensive area, and so clear away. The only way in which to deal efficiently with this manœuvre would have been to employ river police, constantly patrolling in swift motor-launches at night; but it was not found expedient to place such additional requirements at my disposal.

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Hence, troops camped within the various defence sections were still compelled to observe every precaution by night regarding the safety of rifles, despite the protection afforded by the outer block-house line. The troops of the garrison therefore generally dug pits in their tents, into which the rifles of those not on duty were placed at night. The pits were covered with a few boards, several men spread their bedding over these, and slept serenely with the firearms of their section safely tucked away beneath them. No rifle thief had the temerity to endeavour to roll over two or three sturdy Tommies or sepoys while asleep in order to disinter the rifles. That defeated them.

This precaution could hardly be observed by troops on the march, but rifle thefts could largely be reduced if men took the trouble to secure their rifles to their persons, abstracted the bolts, and placed these in their trouser-pockets before turning in to sleep. A rifle without its bolt would have been as much use to an Arab as a sick headache, and he was rarely fool enough to steal a rifle thus deprived of its most essential part. Yet this simple precaution was frequently disregarded, and newly-arrived marching échelons sometimes appeared to think that they were as safe as houses whilst ensconced behind the stout barbed-wire fencing of the block-house line. One light-hearted party of Australasian signallers went one better

after a few days' halt at Amarah. The yarn about rifle thieves was, of course, a pure myth to them, as they had experienced no difficulties in this respect at the various wired-in marching-posts during their march from Basrah. The evening before they were to continue their journey up-country, being anxious, as they subsequently stated, to be off at cock-crow, they betook themselves and their wagons outside the defensive perimeter, and bivouacked on the side of the road just without. They awoke next morning to find they only possessed six rifles between them, out of the seventeen with which they had retired to rest. Their journey was peremptorily postponed whilst inquiries were instituted. More haste does sometimes result in less speed, and they were wiser and sadder youths afterwards.

The Arab thieves being now somewhat limited in their spheres of operations, gradually evolved another daring manoeuvre. The River Tigris below Qalat Salih, some 30 odd miles down-stream of Amarah, flows through a winding channel known as the "Narrows," which abound with sharp turns demanding very careful navigation by steamers, as the confined stream is reduced to a width of only 40 or 50 yards in places. Generally speaking, the channel is deep and the mud-banks firm, though large areas of swamp exist on both banks and a few yards distant only from

the river in some parts. The "Narrows" are about 25 miles in length, and down this portion of the river (almost as far as Ezra's Tomb) the larger steamers, with barges attached on either side, would gracefully cannon from one bank to the other at the more acute bends in what looked a most alarming manner. The marsh Arabs by day would cheerfully run alongside the upgoing steamers, selling eggs, fowls, fish, vegetables, and so on, to the crowds of troops being conveyed north. Bartering would be particularly brisk whilst these steamers tied up to the bank for varying periods in order to permit of the downward passage of steamers booming menacingly along with the strong current. It was then, perhaps, rapid stock was taken of what, and who, were aboard the upward-bound steamers and their attendant barges, and what chances of loot offered. By night the Arabs took to jumping on board these barges when they bumped against the banks in the "Narrows"; and if unobserved, they would silently abstract rifles from the troops sleeping thereon, and leap actively ashore with their booty at the next convenient bump. If detected, they never hesitated to spring overboard, even when carrying a rifle or two, for they could swim like fishes, and were just as much at home in the water as on dry land.

They were enterprising rogues, and some had

even the temerity to leap on to gunboats proceeding up-stream, and defying the vigilance of the naval ratings, pick up a rifle or other desirable object which caught their fancy, and disappear overboard with it in the twinkling of an eye. One unfortunate officer had a beautiful set of false teeth stolen from by his side whilst sleeping placidly on board his ship, and had to live on what might be termed "pish-pash" for several days after his arrival at Amarah, whilst the local Army dentists fitted him out with another complete set. It would be interesting to learn what form of gold and ivory ornament the thief flattered himself he had secured for his loving wife when he ultimately reached home.

Mention should be made also of the difficulties experienced with Arab thieves along the light railway between Qurnah and Amarah. This was constructed along the right bank of the Tigris, and almost throughout its length skirted the great area of swamp between the two places. The line had of necessity to follow a tortuous course near the river bank, to avoid as far as possible traversing the marshes which impinged on the river. Metalling of the track was out of the question, as stone for ballast is about as rare as diamonds of the purest ray serene in this region of Mesopotamia. Consequently the trains could proceed at anything but breakneck speed along

the earth banks, which were in constant danger of being scoured out by the lapping of the marsh waters when stirred by strong winds, or at times of heavy flood. Though up to that date the marsh Arab had never seen a railway or train in his life, in course of time he became familiarized with the puffing monster rumbling through his former peaceful demesne. Familiarity, as usual, bred contempt; and when he grew accustomed to viewing trucks heavily laden with sacks of flour, and many of the requirements of a field army, proceeding leisurely up-country at certain hours of the day and night, he began to cogitate how he might possess himself of some of this good food. He hesitated to extract sacks at night when the train came to a standstill at some small station, for the sepoy escort perched on the top of goods at intervals along the train would then be especially on the alert, and possibly pick him off with their rifles. He came to the conclusion, therefore, that the trick had better be done whilst the train was in motion. Accordingly, he took up his stand at various sharp curves where the train had to proceed with the utmost caution, having acquired, possibly, a decided list to one side or the other. From his coign of vantage, and partially concealed in the darkness by the slope of the bank, the angler would make use of a long pole with stout hook attached

to its end. This he would deftly insert into sack after sack of the mountains heaped on to the low trucks, as the train laboriously lumbered past, and these would come tumbling down the bank beside him. The sepoy escort probably regarded these occasional falls of sacks merely as an unavoidable incident in the journey, due to the roughness of the track, and the fisherman was not often detected or downed. As soon as the train had passed, the booty was rapidly transferred into dug-out canoes near at hand, and conveyed to the innermost recesses of the swamp area. Stout nets had ultimately to be placed over the sacks when trucks were fully loaded up, in order to prevent leakages of this description.

It will probably be understood that efforts were continuously made to recover stolen rifles, and other Government property, by the Political Officers in the various districts where thefts were perpetrated, but these rarely led to much. Surprise visits to neighbouring villages and encampments by cavalry and infantry of the mobile columns were also resorted to from time to time ; but these, too, more often than not drew comparative blanks. One such expedition I recall during the sojourn of the British division for their intensive training at Amarah in October, 1916. The Political Officer informed me that his myrmidons had absolutely marked down a gang of

rifle thieves, who had formed a small colony some ten miles distant, between the Chahalah and Masharreh Canals. I decided to dispatch a force of 200 cavalry and 300 infantry to surround the colony before dawn. The utmost secrecy was observed in our preparations, the Arab guide to conduct the column being kept under lock and key, so to speak, until the hour arrived for the column to sally forth at dead of night. The ten difficult miles of country were covered in the dark without mishap, the objective safely reached, and the unsuspecting encampment cautiously surrounded without disturbing a single soul in it. At the first flush of dawn the column closed in, prepared for the "budmashes" to offer a stubborn resistance rather than allow themselves to be taken alive with their incriminating captures of rifles in their possession. The final rush with fixed bayonets from every side was then made. Much to the chagrin of all, the sole occupants of the encampment proved to be two toothless old hags and an ancient crippled Arab! It certainly was a "sell"; and the strictest search brought to light only one British rifle, several old Martinis, and two or three Turkish rifles. The colony had evidently received timely warning, and cleared out *en bloc* with their most valued booty a few hours before the advent of the column. To show that there was no ill-feeling, however,

the encampment was burnt, and the column returned to Amarah with the few rifles secured. Incidentally, it drove along a flock of 600 fine fat-tailed sheep, which had been rounded up about the encampment. The tired troops dined and slept well the night of their return to Amarah.

Enough has been written, perhaps, to demonstrate the versatility, resource, and courage of these Arab thieves ; and, in conclusion, it may be of interest to draw attention to some features of their training, wherein lie the chief cause of success in their exciting calling. I do not pretend to any inside knowledge of the subject, and the opinions put forward by me are purely personal ones based on some three years' experience of endeavouring to frustrate, amongst other things, the thieving proclivities of some of the Arabs of Iraq. I say advisedly "some," because it is unlikely that any but especially gifted individuals could embark with success on such a career, in face of the difficulties by which they were often confronted. A candidate for high honours in the profession must undoubtedly possess cool calm courage of the 2 a.m. order and peculiar quickness of wit, in order to extricate himself almost automatically from any perilous position in which he may suddenly find himself. He must surely, too, be blessed with the faculty of vision of near objects by night little removed from that of which he is the possessor by day.

He must further be a master of the utmost delicacy of touch, or he would inevitably arouse light sleepers when abstracting rifles lying between them in a crowded tent. But whilst endowed with all such attributes, it is essential also that he should have evolved particular methods of progression which render him invisible, or thoroughly inconspicuous, when drawing near to a camp, and during the committal of skilful thefts therein, whilst moving deftly among the tents, and in and out of them, without attracting the attention of sentries.

The prevalence of jackals and pi-dogs throughout the occupied portions of Iraq perhaps suggested the idea to Arab thieves that the acquisition of a lifelike imitation of the calls, movements, and actions of these animals would greatly further their aims—by disarming the suspicions of alert sentries. In the company of one of my staff I have more than once alighted after dark on Arab urchins, in little-frequented byways of Amarah town, aping on all-fours the ambles and mannerisms of dogs, which they carried out to perfection. On suddenly perceiving that we were British soldiers, the boys would incontinently take to their heels as though they had been caught red-handed in some misdemeanour. "Potential rifle thieves" was the remark that fell from my lips to my companion on such occasions.

I was fortified in this belief by the perusal of the proceedings of many courts of inquiry dealing with the loss of rifles in my command. It was rare, indeed, that sentries on duty ever saw anything—according to their evidence—resembling a human being, outside or within the camp area. The dismal calls of jackals, and the maddening yowls of pi-dogs, alone had disturbed the vigils of an otherwise peaceful night. Yet rifles had gone from tents almost under their very noses, and the loss only discovered after the break of day. An unusually daring theft from the Mudelil Mobile Column camp, located on the river bank at the junction of the Dujailah and Tigris, some 40 miles up-stream of Amarah, sheds a little light on such mysteries. The force consisted of a battalion of Indian infantry, a squadron of Indian cavalry, and a section of an Indian mountain battery. The post constructed for its accommodation was a stout earthen breast-work perimeter, pentagonal in trace, some 4 feet 6 inches in height and 3 feet thick at the top. Outside this was the broad deep ditch, from which the earth for the mud-plastered breast-work had been excavated. Some yards beyond that again was a formidable barbed-wire entanglement, surrounding the entire post save for the roadway leading inland, which was closed at night by a heavy barbed-wire and timber gate, and a sentry stationed thereat. For several months

after the construction of the post it was the pride of the mobile column commander that not one single rifle had been stolen from his force. It was then decided that the Dujailah should be bridged at the post, for in the flood season it was some 15 to 20 feet deep and about 70 yards wide. It was thus a serious obstacle to the movements of the mobile column when required to cross it rapidly for operations on the farther bank.

Accordingly, a bridging train of Indian sappers was ordered to Mudelil to construct a pile-bridge across the Dujailah, and part of the perimeter defences on the side of the post overlooking that stream was entrusted to these new arrivals. Their tents, equipment, etc., were pitched and stacked immediately in rear of the face for whose protection they were responsible; and for some days nothing untoward occurred, whilst the bridging of the Dujailah continued apace. Then one fine morning the column commander was incensed to learn that no less than fourteen rifles had been stolen the night before from the sappers, and immediately telegraphed the unpleasant news to me at Amarah. The court of inquiry elicited the fact that no special precautions had been taken regarding the safety of the rifles in the sappers' tents by night, and that their sentries had seen nothing but an occasional pi-dog jump on to the parapet and disappear either into the camp or

out of it again. As the yapping of pi-dogs, apparently from an Arab encampment a short distance up the Tigris, had been pretty continuous throughout the night, no particular attention had been paid to these intruders, who were merely regarded as harmless scavengers. There is little doubt, however, that these "harmless scavengers" got safely away with fourteen good Government rifles during the night, for the wire outside was skilfully cut in several places to admit of their ingress and egress.

It is perhaps needless to state that a rigid search of neighbouring encampments by the column brought forth none of the missing rifles; but the commander was determined to try and get even with the rifle thieves. He arranged, therefore, for some of the smartest young sepoys in his battalion to conceal themselves at night in the ditch of the post outside the breast-work, and to await events. A few nights later a couple of "pi-dogs" were observed worming their way through the wire in front of the sapper perimeter. They were allowed to get well inside the entanglement, and when this formidable barrier was behind them a sudden rush with fixed bayonets and other lethal weapons was made for the dogs. These were overwhelmed, hacked to pieces, and reduced to a state of pulp by the time they were finished with. They proved to be Arabs, of course. Thus two of this

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daring band of rifle thieves were dispatched ; and the rest gave the post a wide berth during the remainder of the period the mobile column was located there. *El hamdu lillah !*

THE TWO INSEPARABLES

The humble heroes of this faithful narrative were two sepoy of a Punjabi regiment, who held the exalted position of orderlies to my General Staff Officer and myself during the Great War, while we were serving in Mesopotamia. Inseparables they certainly were, but I shrink from likening them to David and Jonathan, as I do not wish to slander the noted dead. It is my purpose, however, to attempt a sketch of the relations which existed between Gholam Khan and Kadir Khan—and, incidentally, ourselves—throughout the period we basked in the sunshine of their attentions.

X—, my senior staff officer, belonged to the aforesaid Punjabi regiment, and it was only natural that his orderly, Gholam Khan, should once have been a shining light of that unit. X—'s Colonel kindly furnished me, also out of the same regiment, with Kadir Khan, a reputed steady-going old soldier, but one not likely to set the Thames on fire.

Gholam Khan was a fine specimen of the Pun-

jabi Mohammedan, with limbs that would have compared favourably with those of a Cumberland wrestler. The longer he remained in our service the more portly became his presence ; for nothing superlative was demanded of him in the way of long marches, or such other strenuous duties as form the usual routine of sepoy on active service. By degrees, too, his cheery countenance assumed a marked rotundity, as the result of regular rations and a life of comparative ease.

Kadir Khan was the absolute antithesis of his fellow-orderly in appearance. A long, thin, cadaverous individual, he seemed to grow leaner and lankier as time went on. Unlike Gholam Khan, he was not so obviously possessed of the gift of speech and ready wit, but was one of those silent men who rarely smile and was by nature somewhat uncommunicative. What he lacked in speech, however, he more than made up for by his skill in sniffing, an irritating trick that never failed him. Even in the hottest part of the hot weather, with a temperature of anything between 115° and 125° in the shade, when colds in the head were certainly not the vogue, Kadir Khan would sniff ! sniff ! sniff ! his way about my room, whilst performing the few light duties that fell to his lot, until I sometimes felt I could strangle him. In self-justification of this attitude I might add that, during this trying season of the year, one's temper

was generally rather "near one"—if one may use such an expression.

Gholam Khan undoubtedly possessed the master mind of the two; and though Kadir Khan was by no means of the village idiot type, yet I would hazard a guess that his friend's influence generally prevailed over his innermost convictions as to what was right and what wrong, in any given situation by which the pair was faced. This was probably due to the fact that Gholam Khan was a landed proprietor in a small way in India, and, from his own account, a man of no mean authority in village councils; whereas Kadir Khan was of the ordinary poor Punjab peasant class. In any case Gholam Khan, who often accompanied us on my inspection tours up and down the Tigris between Basrah and Baghdad, certainly hobnobbed with Indian officers at the various posts where my steamer happened to be tied up for the night, although only a sepoy himself. It was quite common on such occasions for Gholam Khan to ask X——'s permission to go ashore to have his evening meal with Jemadar This, or Subadar That, explaining, "He comes from my district, sahib; but he is really only a small man in our country, for I own far more land than he does." Poor Kadir Khan seldom aspired to such high society, having little more than his lowly position as a General's orderly to

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commend him to these great ones of the earth. There was a good deal of the *grand seigneur* about Gholam Khan, and he loved impressing those around him by his lordly airs. Indeed, he probably led his friends to understand that it was he who "ran" the Tigris Defences, and that I and my staff were largely guided by his experience and advice in all matters pertaining thereto.

It was during the attempt to relieve Kut, early in 1916, that X—— and I became associated in our long partnership of some two and a half years on Tigris Defences, and that Gholam Khan and Kadir Khan threw in their lot with ours. They, however, did not last much over two years, for reasons which will be evident presently. In the early days of our confederacy nothing outstanding regarding the actions and attitude of the twain occurs to my mind, so presumably they were in every way normal and satisfactory. When our inability to relieve Townshend had to be acknowledged, and Kut fell, I was directed, amongst other river defence measures, to establish a fortified post for occupation by a force of all arms at Mudelil—the junction of the Dujailah and Tigris rivers—some 40 miles up-stream from Amarah. Picking up the infantry battalion of this mobile column at Ali Gharbi, on my way down-stream early in May, the steamer continued her journey, with barges attached, to our destination.

A howling gale and series of thunderstorms caused us to tie up for the night at the small Filai Filah post. The only cabins on the steamer were those occupied by the captain and the ship's staff; so all officers aboard had their camp-beds laid out on the upper deck, which possessed a somewhat worse-for-wear awning overhead.

After my bed had been made up, I took the precaution of placing my Burberry under my pillow, anticipating that I should be glad of its protection if another storm visited us during the night. We then had our frugal dinner on another part of the deck, and subsequently turned in. Some time in the small hours of the morning we were subjected to yet another terrific down-pour, accompanied by a hurricane and thunder and lightning of a violent description. The rain descended in torrents through the holes in the awning above, and a regular stream soon began to drop on to my bedding. I felt for my Burberry in order to place it over my blanket, but it had vanished. Presently Gholam Khan arrived on the scene to see how his master was faring, and assisted him to move his bed to a more sheltered spot. I inquired where Kadir Khan was, and why he also had not come. Gholam Khan didn't know. There were seven or eight hundred sepoy distributed about the ship and her attendant barges, so it was not an easy matter to ferret

out any particular individual in the darkness. Gholam Khan helped me, however, to shift my bed, and then went off to summon Kadir Khan, who, I rather suspected, was sleeping not very far from the pitch of his *fidus Achates*.

Eventually the lean one turned up—after the storm had greatly abated—and I asked him what he had done with my Burberry. He replied that my *yak-dan*, or mule-trunk, was in such a very exposed position on the lower deck that he had taken my waterproof from under my pillow—whilst I was at dinner—in order to place it over the trunk in case of rain. Did I thank him for his forethought? Not at all; I considered it more important that I should sleep under tolerably dry blankets than that the leather exterior of my trunk should not be rained upon. I do not believe, moreover, that I am doing Kadir Khan an injustice by suggesting that he, too, had made no little use of the waterproof. At any rate, he presented himself before me in a comparatively dry condition, whereas the indispensable Burberry was saturated when he returned it. A small matter, certainly. But as straws serve to indicate in which direction the wind blows, so this little incident caused me to appreciate that friend Kadir Khan knew exactly how many beans make five, and how to look after himself at the expense of his master.

After laying out the new post at Mudelil, and leaving the battalion there to construct it, I pushed on with X—— to Amarah, where an Arab house on the river-front became my headquarters for the next two and a half years. The offices, British clerks' and servants' quarters were located on the ground floor round the four sides of an open courtyard, to which access was obtained from the road by a covered gateway facing the river. On the first floor above were the living-rooms of my staff of four officers and myself, the mess, our kitchen, and so on. These were over two sides of the quarters enclosing the courtyard below. A long covered veranda ran outside the inner walls of our rooms and overlooked the courtyard, so we could move from room to room under shelter. The veranda on the other two sides, over the remaining clerks' and servants' quarters, was an open one whereon we could sleep under the stars during the hot weather. We generally dined at that season on the flat roof over our rooms, in order to catch every breeze that stirred along the river.

Gholam Khan and Kadir Khan at once proceeded to make themselves snug in one of the quarters on the ground floor which they shared. These sybarites were not going to sleep on the hard mud floor of their habitation, like their less fortunate brethren under canvas at the front and

in posts all up and down the Tigris—not they ! So one of their first acts was to procure timber and rig up substantial cots for themselves. The British soldiers of the units that mounted guard over my headquarters every night had to rest content with the paved floor of the open courtyard during the summer months ; but our orderlies knew a trick worth two of that. When it came, however, to Gholam Khan endeavouring to smuggle his mighty four-poster on to the deck of my small steamer as I was about to start on a tour accompanied by X——, we worms turned. The upper-deck space at our disposal was none too extravagant, and I certainly had no intention of permitting this burly ruffian to take up so large a share of it with his colossal couch. The plain deck should have been quite soft enough for him, seeing that his bones were well covered with brawn and fat. Moreover, the sepoy guard and all native hands aboard enjoyed no better accommodation.

Notwithstanding his predilection for his own creature comforts, there was something distinctly attractive about this merry rogue. His devotion to X—— was dog-like, and often, when X—— was ill, he would sit up with his master and nurse him with the utmost tenderness. He was always cheery and willing to lend a hand at anything. No one excelled Gholam Khan in the purchase of fruit for the mess. He invariably got good

value for his money from the Arabs, though we learnt subsequently that his methods were sometimes inclined to be drastic, and that this stout knave had been known to intimidate the seller if he thought he was being asked too high a price for something likely to be appreciated by the mess. There is no doubt, also, that X—— had too soft a corner in his heart for this sturdy henchman of his, and was inclined to suffer lesser delinquencies to go unpunished, or insufficiently punished, which possibly encouraged Gholam Khan to loftier flights of fancy and ultimately resulted in his downfall.

Soon after settling down in our new headquarters at Amarah my birthday came round. During dinner that evening the cats, with which Amarah is infested, had made night hideous by their discordant caterwaulings, and by tearing after each other on the roof, along the verandas, and on to and under our camp-beds, which had been laid out ready for us under the starlit heavens on the open veranda. The nuisance became so intolerable that we shouted out to the orderlies to keep these mangy scavenging animals off our beds until we retired.

Being an early bird myself, I turned in some time before the rest of my staff, and lay down on my bed, as the hot weather was now in full swing. I was just dropping off to sleep when I fancied

I heard the stealthy approach of those detestable cats again. Raising myself slightly, I looked back over the head of my bed. Suddenly out of the darkness an apparition in white bounded towards me, and before I had time to lift an arm in defence a stick descended with a resounding "whack" on my unoffending pate. For a second or two I felt stunned; then the thought flashed across my mind: "Arab assassin!" I was off the bed in a twinkling, closed with my assailant, snatched the stick out of his hand, and began belabouring him in turn for all I was worth. To my surprise the supposed murderer started to howl for mercy in most unmistakable Hindustani.

"*Mu'af karo, sahib, mu'af karo, ham apna mehtar hain.*" ("Forgive me, sir, forgive me, I am your honour's sweeper.")

"*Mu'af karo?*" I snorted. "I'll *mu'af karo* you, you miserable ruffian. You've jolly near brained me!"—punctuating my remarks by applying the stick.

During this performance I caught snatches of wails: "I thought you were a cat—I thought you were a cat!" which scarcely soothed my hurt feelings. The uproar aroused the guard in the courtyard below, and various members of my staff dashed to my assistance. The man was made a prisoner and marched off lamenting. It

then transpired that friend Kadir Khan had betaken himself to roost and had instructed this humble menial to mount guard over my bed in his place. The sweeper arrived on the scene after I had lain down, and did not know I had gone to bed. Observing my grey head lift itself from my pillow as he approached the bed, he immediately jumped to the conclusion in the darkness: "Ha! a cat on the General's pillow! I'll biff the beggar!"—which he promptly proceeded to do. Unfortunately—for him—the "cat" sprang at him; which, when one comes to think of it, must have been most disconcerting to the astonished man. Staggered by the sudden reversal in the situation, he doubtless imagined, at the first onslaught, that the Evil One himself dwelt within this offensive Amarah cat; and so gave up the unequal struggle.

Anyhow, when I sought my repose again, and thought over the incident, I smiled to myself for some time whilst fondling the sore weal which stood out along the crown of my head until I fell asleep. The sweeper, I fear, did not sleep at all, but probably spent the night meditating on whether it would be boiling oil or some other form of lingering death on the morrow. His surprise and gratitude were great, therefore, when he was ordered to be released and to continue his useful duties at dawn. Thereafter, his attention to me

was almost embarrassing, but I always felt I owed it to Kadir Khan that I should have suffered the indignity of being badly beaten over the head on my first birthday in "Mesopotamia" by this most lowly Indian servant of the entire category.

I must give Gholam Khan and Kadir Khan the credit for not being guilty of any particular lapses from virtue during the next year or so; and will skip the interval by merely remarking that the extent of my command had by then greatly increased. General Maude commenced his offensive against the Turks covering Kut in December, 1916, and by March 11th, 1917, had captured Baghdad. As his victorious army rolled on, my part was to follow closely in his wake, garrisoning important strategic points along the Tigris with additional troops handed over to me by him for the purpose. When Baghdad was occupied my command embraced the whole of the Tigris from Basrah exclusive to Baghdad exclusive, with a portion of the Diala river, and the stretch of the Euphrates from Qurnah to the Hamar Lake thrown in—aggregating in all more than 500 miles of river defences. Thus my command for a time consisted of over 20,000 troops, including cavalry, infantry, and guns. Mobile columns of all arms were located at Amarah, Shaikh Sa'ad, Bghailah, and Azizieh, with marching and railway station defence posts gradually estab-

lished every 12 miles or so between Basrah and Baghdad. Consequently about half my time was spent in touring up and down the river from Amarah inspecting the defences and garrisons.

Small game was very abundant then along the Tigris in the shape of black partridges, sand-grouse, ducks, geese, pigeons, quail, snipe, hares, and so forth. It was often possible to disembark with our guns at the apex of one great bend of the river, and then to shoot across country for several miles to the head of another bend before my steamer had reached that point against the current. In this manner we had frequent opportunities of stretching our legs and obtaining most enjoyable rough shooting whilst touring, without delaying my progress up-stream in any way. As beaters we employed our orderlies and sepoy from the guard on board; and I frankly admit Gholam Khan was as keen as mustard, though Kadir Khan usually ploughed his way in line through the scrub as if ineffably bored by the whole procedure. But there was some incentive for Gholam Khan, since our beaters were generally rewarded with a share of what fell to our guns; and he was ever one who appreciated the fleshpots of Egypt—or Iraq, to be more accurate. He carried his enthusiasm too far, though, at times, by appropriating the lion's portion; and I recall one occasion on which we who had done the

shooting were also to be deprived of our small share by this glutton for game.

We had doled out the birds to beaters and lonely subalterns at marching posts, reserving a modest three "blacks" for our dinner on board. When my orderly officer gave the order to prepare these birds for our evening meal, he was somewhat taken aback by the cook stating that no birds had been handed over to him for the mess. This was surprising, so Gholam Khan was summoned. His explanation was ingenious. The General had seen him *halal-ing*¹ these three birds, so he "naturally inferred" the General tacitly acquiesced in his reserving them for his own consumption! Q.E.D. The assumption, however, was a big one, for we had no religious scruples about eating birds that had been *halal-ed*; and in any case, there seemed no adequate reason why these particular birds should not have formed part of those allotted to the beaters, three others being set aside for us. It might be remarked in parentheses that, in addition to the game birds, my staff captain and I had devoted a couple of cartridges to knocking over some fifteen to twenty starlings, at the earnest request of Gholam Khan. These swarmed around the marching post animal lines, and the ground was thick with them when

¹ Cutting their throats before death, according to the form prescribed by the Mohammedan religion.

we loosed off a cartridge each into the brown. Gholam Khan had then dashed forward as nimbly as a schoolboy, cutting with his jack-knife the throats of dead ones, and chasing the winged ones, which were similarly treated when captured, until he had made a clean sweep of those hit. One would imagine that haul should have kept him going in starling pie for some time, irrespective of black partridges. We used to regard a whole "black" to oneself as a very satisfying meal of a peculiarly delicious kind; but this Gargantua was out for all he could get and more besides. He was forced, however, to disgorge the three "blacks," which he had already plucked and cleaned, so our cook was saved quite a lot of trouble.

By the cold weather period of 1917-18 Gholam Khan had developed into one of the institutions of Amarah; and to see that smartly-turned-out burly form swaggering up and down the river-front in the vicinity of Tigris Defences Headquarters, through the bazaar, and all about the town, at once gave a casual observer the impression, "Here's a bit of a nut. I suppose most of this place belongs to that swashbuckler." It was by no means all reflected glory either, due to his being attached to our humble headquarters, for the man had undoubtedly convinced many people of his ability and sterling worth in various direc-

tions. Still, we were not a little surprised to receive a visit from the local Superintendent of Police, who asked that Gholam Khan might be utilized, when off duty, on secret-service work ! He was required, apparently, to assist in unravelling certain obscurities connected with a series of burglaries which had been taking place in Amarah for some time past. Henceforth Gholam Khan blossomed into "The Ab-so-lute It." He became wrapped in mystery ; even X—— was not admitted into the recesses of his fearsome confidences. The man evidently gained the reputation of being a regular sleuth-hound in running criminals to earth ; and his association with us must, I fear, have been an obnoxious millstone about his neck, as hindering him from rising to the giddiest of heights in the Criminal Investigation Department. Gholam Khan was now at his zenith !

Meanwhile Kadir Khan had not been allowing the grass to grow under his feet. On my return one morning from my usual ride across country before breakfast, I was somewhat astonished to find the bare brick floor of my dungeon gaily decorated with four Persian carpets, which covered almost the entire floor-space. I had not ordered Kadir Khan to embark on the purchase of such costly luxuries on my behalf, so I summoned the varlet. "What is the meaning of this ?" I inquired. "I didn't ask you to buy me any rugs."

A pitying smile spread over his sad face as he sniffed and replied : " They are a present for your Honour ! "

" Devil a bit ! " I hastily ejaculated. " You know quite well I never accept presents from you people." He then explained that the rugs were not a present from himself, but from an Indian merchant who had just arrived in Amarah from Baghdad. I had never set eyes on the gentleman in my life, and I became suspicious. " What's at the back of this ? " I asked myself. " Some intrigue afloat, I suppose, in which, apparently, my good offices are regarded as indispensable."

To cut a long discussion short, my interrogations elicited the intelligence that my unknown benefactor was some sort of connection of Kadir Khan, and was, from my orderly's account, immensely wealthy. He possessed " lakhs and lakhs of rupees," having been a contractor on a large scale at Baghdad. As he had made his fortune, he was now on his way back to India, and was stopping for a time in Amarah visiting friends. Having learnt what a " perfectly priceless father and mother " I had been to Kadir Khan—a little bit of sugar for the bird, be it noted !—he begged me to honour him by accepting these " miserable rugs " as a token of gratitude for my goodness to his relative.

I desired Kadir Khan to express my obligations

to his "relative," and to inform him that I regretted I could not accept the rugs as a present. I should be pleased, however, to store them for him on the floor of my room, thus keeping them in use and preventing them from getting moth-eaten, and when Khuda Bux, the merchant in question, was about to leave Amarah he could send for the rugs again. I guessed, even when I sent the message, that this would not terminate the episode, for I have yet to meet the Indian merchant who is so disgustingly rich that he is not quite ready to add to his millions should he see a favourable opportunity of so doing.

I was not mistaken. A few days later Kadir Khan appeared in my room and asked if he might introduce Khuda Bux into my presence. I was not particularly desirous of meeting this individual, but eventually gave a reluctant consent to see him for a few moments. I was pretty certain that the multi-millionaire, having, as he thought, tactfully prepared the way, would formulate some sort of request before the close of the interview.

Like all Orientals similarly situated, the man did not rush headlong to the point. He skilfully skated over firm ice for some time, talking on different subjects in no way connected with the real object of his visit. Gradually, however, the ice showed signs of growing thin, and finally he was in up to the neck, and the secret was out.

Despite his millions, he did not propose returning to India, apparently, but was anxious to obtain a contract for opening teashops and refreshment rooms for the benefit of the large depots of British and Indian soldiers in Amarah. That was a matter outside my province, for all these local administrative affairs were in the hands of the Administrative Commandant of Amarah, who was not under my orders. Moreover, the troops were already very well supplied in such respects, as I was fully aware.

There was "nothing doing" therefore, so far as I was concerned, and I advised Khuda Bux to apply to the Commandant.

But do you suppose Kadir Khan was in the least abashed at having wilfully misled me by his account of this so-called "relative" of his and by my having seen through their little game? Not a bit of it! He doubtless credited me with an indifferent memory, and judged that his story of several days before had by now been quite forgotten. Anyhow, it was well worth his while to get something out of Khuda Bux for arranging the interview even though it had led to nothing.

Nevertheless, the situation was not without interest, for before long it became faintly discernible that Gholam Khan, Kadir Khan, and Khuda Bux were in some way working together to amass money, despite the vaunted wealth of the last-

named. Exactly what occurred behind the scenes neither X—— nor I were able entirely to fathom ; but after a month or two of good work on secret-service duty in Amarah, for which he was highly commended, Gholam Khan began to fall away from grace in the eyes of his fellow-workers in the police. It may possibly have been due to swollen head on his part, or to his insisting on retaining an undue share of the “swag” extorted from the inhabitants of Amarah by these zealous upholders of British law and order. At all events, he was eventually “run in” by them on a charge of scandalous behaviour.

According to the report of the police officer, Gholam Khan had not only smitten a peaceable citizen over the head, but kicked him out of his own house and proceeded to insult the good man’s lady ! The police then arrived upon the scene, being summoned thereto by the injured husband. That was their story. Gholam Khan denied it with an oath—said the whole thing was a “most ridiculous trumped-up charge.” It was true he was in the house, but he had only gone there to take a few delicacies to a “poor old sick lady” who occupied another apartment altogether. Whilst there he was pounced upon by the police, who had a grudge against him. He was prepared to show us this “old, old lady,” and plaintively inquired of X—— if he thought

it likely that he would desire to behave otherwise than charitably towards such a decrepit old thing. He described her, if I remember aright, as bed-ridden.

We denied ourselves the pleasure of seeing the invalid, but I decided that things were beginning to get a bit sultry when inmates of our headquarters were dragged into these sordid squabbles. I told X——, therefore, that he had better return Gholam Khan to regimental duty in order to prevent a recurrence of such scandals. But Gholam Khan managed to convince his master that he was entirely innocent, and I somewhat weakly consented to his being given one more chance. It was unfortunate for Gholam Khan that I did so, as otherwise he might still have been a free and respected member of his battalion.

For some months there were no further causes of complaint, but with Gholam Khan's master-hand removed from the helm of the Criminal Investigation Department several more burglaries cropped up at intervals. Shortly before I left Amarah to make one of my periodical tours of inspection up the river, in March, 1918, an unusually daring burglary was perpetrated, in which the victim, a townsman, was robbed of some 6,000 rupees in cash and notes. X—— was to remain at Amarah in charge of the office in my absence, so I was accompanied by two other members

of my staff. The morning we sailed it was decided, for some reason I have forgotten, that Gholam Khan should form one of our party, as well as Kadir Khan. Just as we were leaving headquarters for my steamer, Gholam Khan was very insistent on padlocking and sealing his and Kadir Khan's room. When X—— chaffed him about this cautious procedure he explained that he "did not trust the sweeper and other servants remaining behind."

On our arrival at Azizieh a week or so later, amongst the cipher telegrams I received there from X—— was one briefly stating that, a few days after our departure, the police had visited Tigris Defences Headquarters and asked permission to examine Gholam Khan's quarters. They forced the door open in X——'s presence, and some five thousand eight hundred rupees were found concealed in a hole in the ground, covered over by a large wooden box belonging to our orderlies. X—— reported that the police at Baghdad were being communicated with, and would arrest Gholam Khan and Kadir Khan on board when we reached our destination. This was rather a bolt from the blue, but it was necessary to keep the information to ourselves, as I only had a small guard of one Indian N.C.O. and six sepoy on board. These were barely sufficient for existing duties by day and night,

without having to supply an additional sentry over prisoners.

Whether their evil consciences had been troubling them since we left Amarah I cannot say, but there is no doubt that Gholam Khan and Kadir Khan had been distinctly nervous throughout this trip, and they grew more and more agitated as we approached Baghdad.

As soon as my steamer moored close to G.H.Q. in the former British Residency, Gholam Khan and Kadir Khan both asked permission to visit friends ashore. This was refused them, and I judge they then began to smell a rat. The expected police never put in an appearance, and I had eventually to send one of my staff officers to inquire into the cause of delay. The Baghdad police stated that Amarah had not advised them by telegram to arrest any sepoys on my steamer. However, they furnished the necessary guard, who came aboard. Gholam Khan and Kadir Khan were then informed of the discovery made at Amarah, and told that they were to be arrested on the charge of being concerned in the burglary at that place. They feigned the utmost astonishment, and gave vent to the most fervid protestations of innocence. Gholam Khan assured us he could "easily explain" how every farthing of the five thousand odd rupees left behind at Amarah had come into their possession. He could not

well accuse the police of having buried it in his quarters, for he had, in the presence of us all, most carefully locked and sealed the room before our departure, and the police had broken the door open in front of X——.

The bedding and belongings of the precious pair were examined and a further hundred and sixty rupees found therein ; whilst, after the orderlies had been removed from the ship by the police, a native sub-engineer on board handed over an additional sum of twenty rupees, which Gholam Khan had asked him to keep for him in his locker. Here, then, was a sum of practically six thousand rupees accounted for—precisely the amount that had been burgled !

Appearances were certainly against them ; but I had no doubt that Gholam Khan's nimble brain would evolve a most plausible defence when the case came up for trial in Amarah. Kadir Khan I regarded as an accessory before the fact ; I felt tolerably sure it was Gholam Khan who had planned the burglary and everything connected therewith. He had had ample opportunity during his probation with the Amarah secret-service police to learn what mistakes had been made by previous burglars, and how a clever one, up to all the ropes, could best put the authorities off the scent.

Some weeks later the accused were brought down to Amarah for trial in the civil court. Gholam

Khan was anxious to enlist the services of X—— for his defence, and I allowed X—— to attend the trial throughout its course. I wish that I possessed my staff officer's close acquaintance with the astonishing details that were brought to light during that sensational case, in order the more effectively to wind up my story. Failing that, I can deal with the trial on broad lines only. Gholam Khan displayed a wonderful memory for figures and accounts, and *did* explain away to his own satisfaction—and, as he hoped, that of the Court—the presence of every single rupee in the buried hoard unearthed in his and Kadir Khan's quarters. An item that bulked large in his statement was the alleged profits made (greatly to our surprise) by Messrs. Khuda Bux, Gholam Khan, Kadir Khan and Co., in their business transactions at Amarah. Gholam Khan probably flattered himself he had now absolutely demolished the preposterous charge levelled against two simple Indian soldiers of the King.

The revulsion of feeling must have been acute therefore when the merchant prince, Khuda Bux, was produced to give evidence—for the prosecution! All unknown to our sanguine heroes, this man had also been seized for complicity in the burglary, and had elected to turn King's Evidence in order to save his own skin. Khuda Bux divulged to the Court the whole procedure followed by

the conspirators in bringing off this daring burglary, the arrangements for which emanated entirely from the fertile brain of Gholam Khan. The actual robbery, though, was not carried out by that cunning rascal himself. For this purpose he had enlisted the skilled assistance of certain native criminals released from India, who had been given the chance of working out their salvation by service in Mesopotamia as sweepers and in other humble appointments. There were many of them located in Amarah—old hands at burglary—and not a few had kept themselves in practice by victimizing officers and the Arab and other inhabitants of the town. Gholam Khan's previous association with the local Criminal Investigation Department had, no doubt, made this fact well known to him.

In spite of these damning disclosures Gholam Khan—I am treating Kadir Khan as a mere passenger now—by no means threw up the sponge, and counter-attacked Khuda Bux with great violence. He accused him of having fabricated the whole story because, forsooth, Gholam Khan had cut out his erstwhile friend in the favours of some local beauty. Other witnesses, including criminals who admitted everything, were produced, and these supported Khuda Bux's story. Gholam Khan, Kadir Khan, and others implicated were found guilty and sentenced to varying terms of

imprisonment, whilst the insufferably rich Khuda Bux who had risked much in order to add a few paltry hundreds or possibly a thousand rupees to his mythical millions, was deported from the country.

"Heaven help Khuda Bux," say I, when Gholam Khan comes out of prison. If he is not strangled by those powerful hands, it will only be because he has sought refuge in the fastnesses of Nepal or on the summit of Mount Everest.

For some time after their sentence Gholam Khan and Kadir Khan were incarcerated in the civil prison at Amarah, and it really bordered on the pathetic, despite their villainy, to see our former orderlies working with the other criminals on the river-front, dressed in prison garb and clanking around with irons on their legs. The humiliation must have been intense—to have fallen so low where once they regarded themselves of so much account. We eventually managed to get them removed to Basrah prison, where they were at least among strangers. There they would probably pass unnoticed by officers and others who had not known them in happier circumstances.

And what of the rugs? It is they that have conjured up these memories of the past. With the clean sweep accomplished at Amarah, I felt I harmed no one by retaining them in my possession. They certainly had not brought good luck

or affluence to either Kadir Khan or Khuda Bux ; perhaps they would have better luck with me. And so now, in my retirement, two of them help to adorn the dining-room of my cottage by the sea ; the remaining pair occupy a prominent position in the diminutive hall outside the den in which I am writing this distressing tale.

THE TAMING OF THE NARAI TANGI

Towards the middle of January, 1895, an Indian mixed brigade of all arms set forth from Jandola for Kundiwam. At that place a large representative jirgah of the whole Mahtud tribe was to assemble on January 21st, in order to be notified by General Sir William Lockhart of the terms of peace offered to them by the Government of India. For several days the column tramped wearily amid the barren mountains up the stony bed of the Shahur Zam. The physical difficulties, including the Shahur Tangi, which had to be overcome whilst marching in this forsaken land, were far from negligible; and the frequent calls of "Sappers to the front!" had made great demands on those ever-willing and resourceful road-makers. They had, indeed, removed many obstacles to the orderly advance of the unwieldy and heavily-laden camel transport following at the tail-end of the force, but when within a few miles of Kundiwam the advanced-guard commander found himself confronted with something considerably out of the common. It seemed of little profit on this occasion to pass

messages down the line for sappers to make their way to the front. Despite their good-will they could hardly perform off-hand the minor miracle of widening, by the wave of a pickaxe, the amazing cleft in the hills which had brought all progress to a standstill.

Nature in one of her many fantastic frolics had created a pair of giant parallel walls of hard limestone rock, rising almost vertically for several hundred feet out of the shingly river-bed, and separated from each other by a space of only a few feet. The stream flowing along the base of this smooth-faced slit in the mountains was only about 6 inches deep just then ; but it followed a sinuous course through the 50 or 60 yards which constituted the extent of this dangerous winding defile. Almost at its centre the cliffs closed in until they were actually less than 5 feet apart. Here an immense rock of an irregular diamond-shape in section had fallen from the frowning heights above, and was firmly jammed across the narrow opening. Two ends of it rested on either side of the chasm, and the other two pointed upwards and downwards respectively. Sufficient headway, however, remained for a person to walk underneath, as the lower point of the rock was nigh on 8 feet above the bed of the stream ; but no laden camel could pass through that tantalizing eye of a needle.

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The up- and down-stream approaches to this terrible tangi were strewn with great boulders, all of which would require to be blasted away in order to improve the entrance to and exit from the tangi proper. Throughout the greater portion of the further $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles therefrom up to Kundiwam the Shahur stream was confined to a comparatively narrow gorge. Its bed thereabouts consisted chiefly of a confused mass of great boulders and rocks, some almost as big as cottages. Even if the lower tangi had not existed, therefore, the construction of a track for the passage of transport animals along the course of the upper tangi would have involved much labour and time. It was already January 15th, and a seemingly impassable barrier separated the force from the intended meeting-place now so near at hand.

Three R.E. reconnaissance parties were accordingly dispatched at once to examine the country on ahead. They proceeded respectively by circuitous routes along the right and left banks, and up the river gorge itself, with the object of ascertaining how best to circumvent the serious physical obstacles which lay in the pathway of the arrested force. As a result of this reconnaissance it was decided that a track constructed along the left bank, inland from the river, promised the least heavy work. To open out the river route for laden camels, it was then estimated, would

occupy the two companies of sappers, assisted by large infantry working-parties, at least a fortnight. The route advocated over the hills had necessarily to follow a tortuous course. This more than doubled the distance carved out by the river in its inflexible determination to reach the plains of India by the most direct passage possible through this bewildering labyrinth of mountains.

Still, over 1,700 heavily-laden camels formed part of the transport of the force; and these extremely useful but clumsy beasts of burden do not shine when proceeding in single file over hilly tracks, and negotiating steep slippery slopes and rocky steps. It was the depth of winter also, and the hard frosts at these high altitudes converted standing pools of water and small running rivulets in the numerous nullahs to be crossed into solid sheets of ice in the night. A camel on ice is a helpless and pathetic object. His padded feet decline to obey the behests of their owner, and as often as not each foot slithers away in the opposite direction to its next-door neighbour. The result is that laden camels are occasionally so badly spread-eagled that they have to be destroyed. In such circumstances it is obviously desirable to make things as easy as time will admit for these striving but awkward hill-climbers.

Hence the work demanded of the road-makers during the next few days was arduous and varied.

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Many rocks had to be blasted away, stout retaining walls constructed, and lengthy cuttings and banks excavated in the earth or built up on these bleak wind-swept hillsides. Nevertheless, on January 17th, the force was able to move forward three miles in the desired direction by the route made amid the tangled mass of hills. Approaches were furnished from the plateau on which it camped down to the river above the lower tangi, and its water-supply thus obtained. On the 19th it successfully negotiated the remaining four miles over the mountains and down into the now comparatively expansive valley of the Shahur Zam at Kundiwam. The great jirgah was held as intended on the 21st, and the Mahsuds given until March 1st to fulfil the terms demanded by the Government. Meanwhile the force would remain at Kundiwam.

So far so good. In view of the fact, however, that large convoys of camels would be required to move frequently up and down the Shahur as far as Jandola, in order to maintain the mixed brigade at Kundiwam, it was decided that the river route should be tackled from the standing camp at Kundiwam. Once cleared of existing obstacles this direct route would not only reduce the distance by several miles, but should greatly relieve the strain on transport animals. These highly-tried carriers would then be spared the

stern struggles with the long stiff ascents and descents inseparable from the mountain route, and proceed instead by easy gradients alongside or in the river-bed.

Thus the order went forth in due course for the sappers so to subdue and alter the face of nature as to simplify appreciably communications with the advanced base at Jandola. Owing to detachments only half a company of sappers was now left with the force and available for the task; but the captain and his sole remaining subaltern greeted the decision with undisguised approval. Indeed, they had cast longing eyes for some time towards the Narai Tangi, and were anxious to try a fall with this formidable foe to progress along the Shahur Zam. They had latterly examined with some care the $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles of chaotic jumble of huge boulders which strewed the river-bed from Kundiwam down to the entrance to the lower tangi. These quite precluded the idea of constructing a serviceable road through such a turmoil of rocks and water. A rough mountain track, however, was found to exist along the right bank, which was used by Mahsud travellers proceeding on foot up and down the gorge. Generally speaking, its alignment was not inconveniently high above the normal bed of the stream, and the sapper officers judged, therefore, that with a considerable amount of blasting, erection of heavy

retaining walls, and realignments to avoid steep rises and falls in the track, a fair camel road could be ultimately evolved out of the unseemly accumulation of hindrances to orderly movement.

Work was accordingly started on January 28th, and the sappers were assisted by small infantry working-parties of fifty men for the next few days. Since the dawn of creation the Shahur Zam gorge hereabouts had probably never been subjected to such a bombardment and indignities at the hand of man as followed. The eternal cliffs reverberated at frequent intervals with the booms of loud explosions, whilst boulders flew into fragments and hillsides were brought tumbling down. A liberal application of dynamite, rammed into holes bored in the rocks for its reception, proved the most efficacious and economic medium of destruction. From the débris and broken-up slabs stout dry-stone masonry retaining walls arose aloft. As day succeeded day order was rapidly produced out of the chaos of rocks and boulders ; and these retaining walls carried along their summits a broad well-graded roadway, over which it would have been almost possible to drive a gig. Towards the close of the fifth day's work the General and his staff rode down the $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles of new road to the mouth of the lower tangi and back. He saw that the work was good, and on his return he expressed to the modest sapper captain his

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appreciation of what had been done. This considerably surpassed his expectations, and he directed, therefore, that the men should be granted a holiday the following day in recognition of their labours.

The upper tangi had now been conquered; but the crux of the whole situation—viz. those 50 or 60 yards of grim defile between beetling cliffs, which culminated at its centre in that narrow rift surmounted by the colossal rock—had yet to be tackled. The sappers decided to undertake this tricky work unaided; and the first day was spent by them in blasting away large boulders at the approaches, in order to improve the entrance to and exit from the tangi proper. The suspended rock received attention the next day.

By means of an improvised wooden ladder it was comparatively simple to climb the 12 feet or so out of the river-bed on to the rock. This was found to be resting on irregular ledges on each side of the chasm; and whereas the width of the opening below the rock was under 5 feet, the supporting ledges receded back on each side perhaps another 18 inches or 2 feet. The almost vertical limestone cliffs were thus separated from each other by 8 or 9 feet above the resting-place of the rock, and afforded scant elbow-room for men to work on the upper half of the jewel-shaped obstruction. Sappers were immediately put on to jump holes into the upper surface of the rock

with the intention of first cutting away the top half of this 20-ton diamond. Owing to the cramped and confined space in which those aloft had to work, the task was one of considerable difficulty, necessitating frequent reliefs. No sun ever penetrated into this gloomy abyss, and keen icy blasts blew continuously through the narrow gateway; whilst the temperature of the stream coursing 6 inches deep along the base of the cliffs was close on freezing-point at midday. It was near 3 p.m. therefore before the holes were ready, and the mines were then fully charged with dynamite.

This done, the captain and subaltern relieved the men on the rock, and themselves carefully introduced into the mines the detonators and fuses. They were taking no undue risks, so cut off fairly long lengths of fuse; for after lighting these they had to descend to the bed of the stream by the steep and rickety ladder, and carry that off with them to safety beyond the upper end of the serpentine defile—a distance of over 30 yards along the bed of the icy rivulet. When all the men had withdrawn from the gorge the captain and subaltern rapidly lit in turn the several fuses; and as soon as all were satisfactorily spitting out their jets of flame, they shinned down that flimsy ladder quicker than ever lamp-lighter swarmed up one. Grasping the ladder between them when both had reached the ground, they cleared out of

that tangi as if the Evil One himself were in hot pursuit of them, until they rejoined their men in the zone of safety without.

It was not long before an appalling roar, which seemed to issue from the very bowels of the earth and to shake the scenery, disturbed the stillness of the fading day. Giving time for the smoke and dust to dissipate and for the altered conditions to settle down, the captain and subaltern mounted their steeds and rode into the tangi to view the result of the explosions. The top half of the suspended rock had been completely cut away as desired, and the débris therefrom effectually blocked the narrow passage below, save for a small opening through which the stream, now banked up to a depth of some $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet, was pouring. It was getting late, and the party was an hour's march from camp, so no more work was attempted that day.

The whole of the following day was spent in removing the débris of the rock that had been bisected by the explosion and demolishing the remainder of it. The greater portion of that which had fallen had been pulverized into manageable bits for removal to the outside of the tangi; but one large mass of it yet remained intact in the bed of the stream. It rested immediately below the lower point of that still suspended, and thus between them they seriously obstructed the fair-

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way. Whilst the bulk of the débris of the first explosion was being removed piecemeal, therefore, two parties of men were employed in jumping holes into the lower half of the original suspended rock and the obstruction in the bed of the stream. When ready both were charged with dynamite, and all the mines fired together. There was no sparing of dynamite, and when the tangi was cautiously re-entered after the terrific resulting explosion both rocks were found to be completely disintegrated. But the sappers were kept hard at it until nearly 6 p.m. removing the fresh débris before the passage could be regarded as sufficiently clear to admit of any traffic through the defile.

It had been a tough day's work, for men and officers had spent most of it standing in a swift icy stream, almost knee-deep, owing to the accumulation of débris below the points of explosion. A piercing wind blowing with considerable force through the narrow defile added to the discomforts of the situation : so reliefs had to be frequent, whilst the iconcolasts thawed themselves at large log fires which were kept going from morn until eve at each end of the tangi. But the great rock which had been firmly wedged, perhaps for centuries, across this congested cleft in the mountains had been removed from its long resting-place, and was no more. There still remained, however, the widening of the passage itself, which

promised to be no simple undertaking, since the surface of the solid limestone cliffs had been worn as smooth almost as glass by ages of flowing waters.

In order to facilitate the task of jumping holes in the face of the cliffs, pine poles and a few rough boards were purchased from the Mahsuds of Kundiwam village, and primitive scaffoldings were erected therewith in the tangi for the men to stand on whilst at work. Four grand blasts were got off during the day at the narrowest part of the tangi, and all débris removed immediately after each blast, in order to avoid banking up the stream more than necessary. The 5-foot gateway was enlarged to close on 7 feet before work ceased for the day, and by the next evening the cleft had been opened throughout to a width of about 8 feet.

The Narai Tangi was put to its first test as a highway the following morning, when a large convoy of all the camels with the force left Kundiwam by the new river route for Jandola, escorted by the 14th Sikhs. The last camel passed safely through the upper and lower tangis at noon. The captain and subaltern, perched on the remains of the ledge overlooking the narrowest part of the defile where the great rock had rested, witnessed with satisfaction the stately procession of camels below them, and took note of any obstructions that might hereafter interfere with the orderly progress of future convoys. As a result of their

observations, it was decided that the removal of a few extra chunks and corners at different points along the cliffs would still further facilitate movement through the tangi. These were subsequently blown to dust, and the defile trimmed throughout its length. The minimum width nowhere fell below 8 feet 6 inches when all work ceased a day or two later on the Narai Tangi.

This served thereafter as the Queen's highway for horse and foot whilst the force remained in those inhospitable regions ; but it was with feelings of regret that the captain and subaltern contemplated the completion of their labours. Notwithstanding the numbing sensations of working in icy-cold water and confinement to a gloomy rocky cleft down which a strong gale was always blowing, the task of taming this tyrant tangi to the requirements of the field-force had been full of interest. It had not been entirely lacking in elements of excitement either ; and if the emotions of the sepoy of the infantry working-parties who shared in the conquest of the upper tangi were analysed, one would probably learn that they seldom sought shelter from the bullets of the enemy more readily than they cleared for zones of safety to dodge the deluge of rocks and stones following upon the explosion of large mines in those rugged gorges.

The sentiments of the Mahsuds regarding this

desecration of one of the most formidable gateways into their country were perhaps somewhat mixed. Some of the elders probably welcomed the improved means of communication thus gratuitously granted them for reaching and trading in the plains of India, whilst the younger bloods of a more fire-eating disposition possibly viewed with disfavour this tampering with yet another obstacle to the orderly advance of the Sirkar's troops to their vitals, in the event of their once again incurring the wrath of long-suffering British India.

THE PASSING OF WYAKI

It is strange how the perusal of a stray paragraph in the papers often vividly recalls events of the past. Last night, whilst reading *The Times*, my attention was arrested by a heading, "King's Medal for Kenya Chiefs." I there learnt that an interesting ceremony, without precedent in the history of Kenya Colony, had been performed at Government House, Nairobi, on the King's Birthday. The King's Medal for Native Chiefs was then presented by the Governor to one Kinyanjui, paramount chief of the Wa-Kikuyu, for good services rendered during the campaign against the Germans in East Africa.

The disorderly happenings in Ireland and the varied interests of to-day were forthwith banished from my mind. Memory hurried me back thirty years to a tragedy of which I was a witness within the precincts of Fort Smith in Kikuyu. This concerned the murderous assault made by Wyaki, the then paramount chief of the Wa-Kikuyu, on Mr. Purkis, the representative of the Imperial British East Africa Company in Kikuyu. That

unprovoked attack resulted in the downfall of Wyaki, and the installation by us of the aforesaid Kinyanjui, then a young man, to reign in his stead. How well Kinyanjui has performed the difficult duties which have devolved on him during the intervening years the paragraph referred to above makes clear.

It is my purpose in this article, however, to relate something of the troublous times in Kikuyu before the advent of the Uganda Railway, and during the treacherous sway of Wyaki. That chief-tain had, from the first, been largely instrumental in stirring up the truculent Wa-Kikuyu to oppose British occupation of this remote and fertile region, which is situated 350 miles from Mombasa on the main route to Uganda.

It was in 1890 that the Imperial British East Africa Company decided to establish a station in Kikuyu for the assistance of caravans proceeding through Masailand. The task was entrusted to Captain (now Brig.-General Sir Frederick) Lugard, who selected a site near a spot known as Dagoretti. The Wa-Kikuyu feigned delight at the prospect of a British post in their midst, and Wyaki went to the length of making blood-brothership with Lugard. A strong stockade was erected to enclose store-houses and buildings; and leaving Mr. George Wilson and some forty Swahilis to hold the new station Lugard continued his journey to Uganda.

For a time things progressed satisfactorily ; but before long the natural treachery of the Wa-Kikuyu revealed itself, and Wyaki murdered two of Wilson's porters, who had visited his village to buy food for the garrison of the post. This led to hostilities, and Wilson was hard pressed whilst endeavouring to maintain his position. Day by day his list of killed and wounded in the besieged post increased. With great difficulty he managed to get a runner through to Machako's Fort, some 50 miles nearer the coast, asking for a further supply of ammunition, and men if they could be spared. The commandant refused to send the assistance so urgently needed. Finally, when his ammunition was nearly exhausted, Wilson realized that the situation was becoming hopeless. He abandoned the fort, therefore, and fought his way through the surrounding forests to the Athi plains, whence he continued safely to Machako's. There he reorganized his force and set out once again to reoccupy Dagoretti ; but on reaching that place he found nothing left of the fort or its valuable stores, save some smoking ruins.

The occupation of Kikuyu, however, was a matter of great moment to the Imperial British East Africa Company, as it afforded an important jumping-off place for traversing the great foodless tract of country which intervened between Kikuyu and Lake Victoria. Kikuyu, relatively speaking,

flowed with the proverbial milk and honey, owing to the fertility of its soil, its succulent pasturages, and the numerous clear streams coursing through its narrow valleys. Moreover, by reason of its altitude of over 6,000 feet above sea-level, it was one of the healthiest districts in British East Africa. Cereals and live stock were procurable in abundance for the onward journey to Uganda; whilst sweet potatoes grew practically wild, and were so cheap an article of diet that porters could purchase some 6 or 8 lb. of them as rations for one string of small beads. They were certainly very filling at the price.

A fresh effort was made, therefore, to establish a post in Kikuyu. This time the venture was undertaken by Captain (now Colonel) Eric Smith of the 1st Life Guards, an enterprising officer of wide East African experience. He was assisted by Mr. Purkis, a very handy young fellow, formerly a sailor, and with some South African experience. They set out from the coast in 1891 with a strong and well-equipped caravan. Smith decided to beard the lion in his den. Instead of halting on the fringe of the cultivated areas within the forest belt of Kikuyu, he boldly pushed on to Wyaki's village itself. There he calmly proceeded to pitch his camp in the centre of that disconcerted chieftain's stronghold. He now enjoyed six to four the best of the situation, and further negotiations

followed with commendable promptitude. An excellent site for the proposed fort was without difficulty acquired from the nervous Wyaki—on a flat-topped open spur in close proximity to, and overlooking, his village. A small stream flowed down the valley below, whence water was easily drawn under the protection of the fort; whilst the country round consisted of acres and acres of sweet potatoes. Food and water, therefore, were close at hand in the event of the Wa-Kikuyu kicking over the traces and subjecting the fort to a siege, in accordance with precedent.

For some months thereafter Smith despatched well-armed working parties daily to the neighbouring forests to cut down suitable saplings for the construction of the stockade, and the store-houses and quarters erected within its perimeter. In March, 1892, the Uganda Railway Survey Expedition, under the command of Captain (now Major-General Sir Ronald) Macdonald, reached Fort Smith from Mombasa; and we found Smith and Purkis comfortably installed in the new station, which had nearly approached completion. It was by far the most imposing post between the coast and Uganda, and consisted of a large oblong-shaped stockade surrounded by a deep ditch with a barbed-wire fence on the glacis. Entrance to the fort was effected by means of two draw-bridges across the ditch. These were drawn up

at night, and the flanking defence of the perimeter was adequately provided for by means of bastions. Within the formidable enclosure brick quarters had been built for the officers, barracks for the men, and spacious stores for goods and grain; whilst a lofty flag-staff arose from the centre of the velvet-turfed fort square, and proudly flew from its summit the Company's flag.

Now that Smith and Purkis had evacuated Wyaki's village and taken up their residence in the fort, that potentate's protestations of pleasure at the settlement of white men in his territory began, gradually, to wear a bit thin. Before long, rumours were rife that Wyaki was secretly scheming against the British with the Wa-Guruguru, a neighbouring clan of Wa-Kikuyu with whom Wyaki was connected by marriage. But during our brief sojourn at Fort Smith the country bore an atmosphere of calm, though the founder of the post was not without misgivings lest trouble might yet arise as the result of Wyaki's intrigues. Still, the situation was sufficiently satisfactory to admit of the departure of Captain Eric Smith for the coast and England a few days after our arrival.

The command of this important outpost of Empire then devolved on Purkis, who was supported by a garrison of 100 Swahilis. We, too, shortly continued our journey to Lake Victoria and Uganda; so Purkis was left entirely to his own

resources in this turbulent region for the next four and a half months. He proved fully equal to his responsible position. Step by step he widened the area of his activities by tapping districts farther afield for food. He made friends with one Wandenge, the chief of a district some 12 miles from the fort, whence quantities of grain were cheaply procured and stored in the fort for the use of passing caravans. So peaceful for a time remained the outlook that small parties of a dozen armed Swahili porters were soon in the habit of travelling to and from Wandenge's village and the fort in perfect safety.

The chief danger to be apprehended seemed that of Masai raids into Kikuyu—from the grazing grounds frequented by those war-like nomads, and by which the country was surrounded. This menace was shortly translated into action by a marauding band of six or seven hundred El Moran, or Masai warriors, who invaded Kikuyu territory in May, 1892, and devastated the country to within a few miles of Fort Smith. Wyaki and the Wa-Kikuyu, in their plight, appealed to Purkis for assistance in driving the raiders out of the country. This he at length consented to give when the Masai, carried away by their own enthusiasm as the result of their earlier successes, had the temerity to approach the precincts of Fort Smith. Turning out with his garrison armed with rifles,

and backed by some 5,000 Wa-Kikuyu—now boldly assembled under the white man's fearless guidance—Purkis gave battle to the raiders on May 23rd. The unexpected rifle-fire proved too much for the Masai warriors, who fled precipitately, holding their shields over their backs as though these would afford protection against the impact of bullets. They thus offered excellent targets. As soon as the Wa-Kikuyu saw the Masai on the run they valorously gave chase, and speared a good many in addition to those who had been shot. Purkis's share of the spoil consisted of some fifty spears and shields. One of the latter, which was hanging up in his room on our return from the lake, had two bullet holes in it, almost plumb through its centre. A great number of cattle and large flocks of goats and sheep were captured, too, from the discomfited raiders by the pursuing Wa-Kikuyu.

This profitable intervention on the part of Purkis should, one would think, have earned the unswerving loyalty of Wyaki, and have brought home to that chieftain the inestimable advantage of living under the protection of the British. But it was not so; for that scheming rogue was soon at his old tricks again when his fears regarding the recent invasion of the Masai gradually subsided. A few days before the return of the Survey Expedition to Fort Smith from Uganda, in August,

1892, Purkis sustained a great loss in the death of his Swahili headman, Makhtūb, who was murdered by the Wa-Guruguru. The man was accompanied by ten armed Swahilis when they were attacked; and of these six were killed, while the remainder escaped with great difficulty, bearing the evil tidings to Fort Smith.

This deplorable outrage placed Purkis in a serious dilemma; for Makhtūb was his right-hand man. The Guruguru district was some 15 miles distant from Fort Smith, and Purkis dare not venture so far afield to administer punishment on the tribe, as this would entail his leaving the fort in charge of a Swahili subordinate during his absence. He knew Wyaki's connection with the Wa-Guruguru too well to take so great a risk, and yet his apparent inaction encouraged hostile sections of the Wa-Kikuyu to further deeds of defiance. Food parties, mail carriers, and others who strayed from the fort were set upon, whilst Wyaki and his followers covertly considered the chances of repeating at Fort Smith the success which had attended their efforts at Dagoretti.

Purkis's relief may be imagined, therefore, when the Railway Survey Expedition marched in once more on its way to the coast. He immediately applied to Macdonald for assistance, which was promptly accorded; and an expedition against the Wa-Guruguru was rapidly organized. So

secretly was this done that those of our Indians and Swahilis who were told off for the operations knew nothing of our destination when they were aroused at 2 a.m. on the morning of August 12th. The Wa-Kikuyu guides, amongst whom were the two friendly chiefs, Kinyanjui and Mlu, were interned for the night in the fort lest news of our intention should inadvertently leak out amongst Wyaki's followers.

And so we set out silently from our camp outside Fort Smith in the small hours of the morn—a force some 200 rifles strong. It was divided into five companies, each under a British officer, including Purkis with fifty rifles from the fort garrison. The rest of the Survey Expedition, under an officer and British N.C.O., remained behind to protect the fort, and our camp without, during the absence of the punitive force.

We were back again at Fort Smith on the afternoon of the third day, winding up with a 15-mile march from Wandenge's. During this period we had covered 45 to 50 miles over difficult country, meting out punishment to those sections of the Wa-Guruguru who were implicated in the murder of Makhtūb and his small party. This necessitated the burning of some thirty-five villages in the thickly populated areas where opposition was met with before the recalcitrant tribesmen rendered their submission and promised exemplary

behaviour for the future. The services of Kinyanjui were invaluable throughout the operations, both as guide and emissary. The initial night march into Guruguru without his assistance might well have resulted in a failure to surprise the natives, so intricate was the terrain traversed by the column in the dark. The country consisted of a seemingly endless succession of ridges and deep, steep valleys, up and down which we were continuously clambering. The district was profusely cultivated in the vicinity of villages; elsewhere it consisted chiefly of alternate patches of tall, thick scrub and short springy turf. Strips of forest existed along the slopes of the deeper ravines, and afforded considerable cover to those crouching within their shelter. The soil, generally of a rich loamy clay, soon became terribly slippery during the passage of men whose bare feet were dripping with the waters of the streams crossed at the bottoms of the numerous valleys. The ascent up the steep sides of such valleys was often very laborious in consequence, and made marching under these conditions extremely fatiguing.

Most of the Guruguru villages of importance were concealed in thick patches of bush or small woods. They were generally surrounded by thorn zaribas, whilst the walls of the circular huts were of rough boarding and surmounted by dome-shaped roofs of grass thatch. Consequently they burnt

very readily, and some of the conflagrations were so truly impressive, and the columns of smoke visible from so great a distance, that they speedily stimulated the Wa-Guruguru to come to terms.

During our peregrinations of destruction we were guided to the spot where Makhtūb was killed; and as that event was still of recent date, traces of the struggle and the scene of the last stand were clearly discernible. The scrub was much trampled down; portions of cloth were recognized as belonging to Swahilis who were speared with him; and there a skull, with two front teeth missing, was all that remained of another identified porter of his party. Ear ornaments, likewise, belonging to the attacking Wa-Guruguru, were picked up close to hand, and that was pretty well all left of the dead by the voracious hyænas with which the country abounds.

The expedition was distinctly disappointing in one respect; and that was our failure to capture herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, which the Wa-Guruguru were known to possess in large numbers. We secured no cattle, and only fifty or sixty goats and sheep. For this, we learnt later, we had to thank Wyaki, who had by some means obtained an inkling of the impending punitive expedition, and sent out warnings hot-foot to his Guruguru relatives. Prior to our arrival in their territory, therefore, they had driven their

flocks and herds away to the fastnesses of the forest belt which fences their country in. There they were inaccessible to us in the short time we could spare for the punishment of the hostile natives.

On our return to Fort Smith we adjourned to Purkis's messroom to partake of a much-needed cup of tea after the labours of the day. Purkis retired to his own room, which was next the mess, for a wash and brush-up before joining us at the repast. Whilst we were seated at tea Wyaki suddenly arrived from his village and looked in at the window of the messroom. Apparently seeing that Purkis was not with us, he continued along the veranda in the direction of that officer's room. We were shortly afterwards startled by the sounds of a struggle, followed by stentorian shouts of "Kill him! Kill him!" in the excited tones of Purkis. We were out of the messroom in no time, and saw Purkis and Wyaki locked together in the veranda, the former brandishing Wyaki's *simé* (a spatulate-shaped sword) over that chief's head. Captain (now Colonel Sir John) Pringle, R.E., who was first out of the messroom, was on to Wyaki in two bounds, and, seizing him by the throat, hung on like a bulldog. In a few seconds Wyaki was overpowered and hurled to the ground, whilst the whole garrison of the fort turned out like magic with their rifles in response to Purkis's shouts. They would, without doubt, have slain

Wyaki on the spot had we not been present. Rope was sent for instead, and Wyaki was soon bound hand and foot in such a manner that he was scarcely able to move. Later, he was handcuffed around the flag-staff, with a chain about his neck as an additional safeguard; and in this state he spent the night in the fort square.

Wyaki had obviously been drinking *tembo*. Annoyed at the injury inflicted on his Guruguru friends, he had forced his way unbidden into Purkis's room and there began to taunt him with his failure to capture their cattle and flocks. Purkis ordered Wyaki to leave the room, whereupon Wyaki suddenly drew his *simé* from its sheath and was about to cut Purkis over when the latter fortunately detected the movement. He rapidly closed with Wyaki, dealt him a right-hander under the chin with his fist, and, snatching the *simé* out of Wyaki's hand, caught him a crack over the head with his own weapon, which was considerably bent by the blow. These tactics had brought both combatants into the veranda, and Purkis's shouts had quickly drawn us to his assistance. It was a pity Purkis's blow was interfered with by the lowness of the veranda roof; but it was sufficiently shrewd to inflict a pretty severe scalp wound, which bled freely, and Pringle was a sanguinary-looking object when he had done with the great Wyaki.

The news of Wyaki's attempt at assassination, and capture, spread like wildfire. The people of his village fled in mortal terror, driving their flocks before them. The inhabitants of other villages in the neighbourhood of the fort likewise took to their heels, fearing that they, too, would be punished for the sins of Wyaki. Kinyanjui and Mlu, who were both present in the fort, and had witnessed the affray, were at once despatched by Macdonald to tell the people that we regarded the incident as a purely personal matter, and that we did not propose to fight over it unless the first show of hostility came from the Wa-Kikuyu. They were instructed, also, to summon all the heads of the neighbouring villages to a large *shauri* (council) in the fort next morning, so that they might hear full details of the crime, and what it was intended to do with Wyaki.

Next morning nineteen lesser chiefs put in an appearance in the fort, after assurances that no harm should come to them, and the whole case was there thrashed out. They were told that for such a barefaced attempt to murder Purkis there were only two courses open to us—either that we should shoot or hang Wyaki straight away, or that we should take him down to the coast with us as a prisoner, in order that he might there be dealt with by the Administrator-General of the Company. We had decided to adopt the latter course.

The *shauri* of Wa-Kikuyu entirely concurred in our decision. They said that if we desired to kill Wyaki now, they agreed : if we took him away never to return, they agreed. He was a bad man, and was always trying to raise trouble between them and the *Mzungu* (European), and they wished now to be friends. The *shauri* then asked that we should appoint another chief in his place, and it was resolved that for the present there should be a dual kingdom—Mlu and Kinyanjui holding sway *vice* Wyaki deposed. As these two men were great friends, and both much attached to Purkis, it was hoped that there would be little trouble with the Wa-Kikuyu henceforth. Kinyanjui thus first rose into prominence, and has since justified the confidence placed in him that August morning thirty years ago.

These matters being satisfactorily arranged, the villages around were quickly reoccupied, and a holy calm once more settled upon the scene before nightfall. Wyaki's old father sent a messenger to the fort requesting that he might ransom his son with cattle and goats, the usual Kikuyu method of patching up the peace ; but the proposal was, naturally, not entertained. Next day some of Wyaki's people were permitted to visit him in the fort, prior to his departure for the coast with us the following day. His old mother brought round sheep for him to eat on the journey down,

and when the first one was killed in the fort Wyaki begged Macdonald to take one half of it for the use of the survey officers. It was certainly rather forgiving of the rogue.

On August 17th, 1892, we continued our return journey to the coast, Wyaki accompanying us in chains under an escort of Indians with fixed bayonets. He had precious little chance of escape, therefore, should a rising take place, and an attack be made on us whilst penetrating the belt of forest. The Wa-Kikuyu were far too frightened, however, to attempt anything of the kind, and, except just outside the fort, where there was a small gathering of them to see Wyaki depart for the coast, our caravan of over 400 souls was studiously avoided. We saw few natives throughout the march, save at a distance—a very different state of things from our march into Kikuyu five months earlier, when the *shambas* were alive with Wa-Kikuyu, and the route more or less lined with them.

There is no need to follow Wyaki farther on his journey towards the coast. He was never destined to reach it; for when the expedition arrived at the Scottish Mission Station at Kibwezi, still some 200 miles distant from Mombasa, Wyaki succumbed to the sword-cut he had received from Purkis. It had been carefully attended to, and he had appeared little the worse for it at first; but complications set in later which pointed

to his skull having been originally fractured. When it was reported to the Administrator-General, on our arrival at Mombasa, that Wyaki had died during the journey, he promptly replied, with a whimsical smile, "I think he showed great tact."

Wyaki, then, lies buried at Kibwezi. By a curious turn of fate poor Purkis, who continued to do excellent work in Kikuyu and Uganda for some years afterwards, ultimately died at Kibwezi too, on his way to the coast. These two enemies in life thus peacefully sleep their long sleep in close proximity to one another in the churchyard of the old Kibwezi Mission Station.

NAIVASHA IN THE 'NINETIES

As one of four officers from India who travelled through British East Africa in 1891-92, in connection with the preliminary survey for the Uganda Railway, a few impressions of those days may serve to contrast the conditions then existing with those of the present time. This expedition was, in reality, the first to introduce Indians to the interior of British East Africa, for it consisted of some four hundred Swahilis from Zanzibar and Mombasa and forty Indians taken by us from India. The majority of these Indians were Pathan *khalessies*, men trained to do chaining, etc., on survey work, who had gained their experience with us on the Kabul River and Zhob Valley Railway surveys between 1889 and 1891. They were now conducted far from their homes, about Peshawar, to distant Uganda, a country of which they had never even heard.

The exploitation of East Africa during the past three decades has largely dispelled the romance formerly associated with that part of the Dark Continent. Gone for ever are the days when

important geographical discoveries were to be made by travellers venturing to the more remote and practically unexplored regions between the Indian Ocean and the great Central African lakes. Thirty odd years ago, however, in the territories administered by the Imperial British East Africa Company, normally but one caravan a year set out on the 800-mile journey from Mombasa to Uganda, taking up supplies and mails to the few Europeans who there lived an isolated existence as Company officials and missionaries. Consequently, considerable areas still remained unmapped between the coast and the Victoria Nyanza.

But the construction of the railway to the lake—chiefly by imported Indian labour—and improvements in communication with the iron road, soon attracted further numbers of white settlers and officials to the bracing plateaux of British East Africa. The surveyor then commenced, too, the systematic mapping of the whole country; and it may now be said that few areas are left therein which have not been visited by the trained geographer. There is probably little more to be learnt, therefore, in a scientific sense, of this once savage yet fascinating land. Well-nigh every mystery and conjecture concerning the country and its inhabitants has been set at rest; and what was still shrouded in romance in the early 'nineties has become a mere commonplace of to-day. Such

is the inevitable law of progress ; but the introduction of civilization into those former wild regions has unquestionably detracted much from their whilom charm.

In the "good old days" one experienced an undiluted glow of satisfaction in the thought that few, if any, Europeans had previously wandered where one now trod, and, with no desire to be unsociable, that you and your white companion were the only men of your race within, perhaps, hundreds of miles of the spot whereon your camp was pitched for the night. In those days one knew personally, or at least by name, practically every white man scattered throughout the length and breadth of British East Africa between Mombasa and Uganda. Of Indians there were none outside Mombasa and other coastal towns ; and of these not a few were, by repute, associated with the Arabs in the slave trade.

How different was the state of affairs ten years later, when last I travelled through that country ! Already the whites were fairly jostling each other, whilst Indians were a common sight in such salubrious centres as Nairobi. This place one remembers as nothing at all, if one may use the expression. Not even a Kikuyu hut marked the site of this now flourishing township and capital of Kenya Colony. Tapering spurs whose summits and sides were covered with sweet potatoes, and

plantations of Indian corn and millet; clear rippling streams running down the narrow intervening valleys, the slopes clothed in sugar-cane; patches of soft velvety turf and bracken, springing up from a wondrous fertile soil in which every form of English vegetable revelled outside the Company's post at Fort Smith—these are what one connects with the Kikuyu clearings amidst the surrounding belts of wood and forest of those days.

To reach this attractive region by the old caravan route the traveller had to thread his way along some 200 miles of riband-like track through thick bush country. There water was scarce, and obtained chiefly from certain *ungurungas*, or rock-pools, usually ten or twelve miles apart. What a relief it then was to feel that the barren and seemingly interminable bush had at last been left behind one! The pleasant district of Ukhambani which one now entered, with its crystal streams flowing through relatively fertile and well-cultivated valleys, enclosed by hills and bluffs of distinction, was enchanting in comparison. A few marches farther and one beheld, from the Company's little post at Machako's, open, rolling, grassy plains, stretching away to the horizon, north, east, and west. These are the noted Athi plains, a paradise for game, which intervene for some forty miles before the forest fringe of Kikuyu

is reached. Another ten miles through undulating forest clearings, laboriously cultivated, land one at Fort Smith—so named after Captain Eric Smith of the Life Guards, who has lately built this formidable outpost of Empire in the heart of territory inhabited by truculent and treacherous Wa-Kikuyu: and he welcomes us on our arrival.

Fort Smith has long since been abandoned in favour of Nairobi; but here we are some 350 miles from Mombasa and over 6,000 feet above sea-level, so the climate is invigorating all the year round. I will ask the reader, however, to accompany me to a still more delightful locality, a few miles farther yet up-country, and known as Lake Naivasha.

Leaving the hospitality of Fort Smith, and this land which nature has so bountifully favoured, we wend our way over a wavy, wooded tract, but rising steadily during the next 16 miles, to the summit of the Kikuyu escarpment. Thence, from an altitude of 7,200 feet, we descend by a steep rocky path into the Great Rift Valley, 1,400 feet below, and camp on the bank of the Kedong stream. Foodless wilds now lie ahead for twenty-five marches before the flesh-pots of Kavirondo are reached by the ordinary caravan route via the Uasin Gishu plateau; but there is much compensation for this in the beautiful and varied scenery through which the track runs.

At dawn, after the descent into the Kedong, the caravan is roused by a distinctly musical chant from without the camp, which is enclosed by a stout abattis of thorn branches. It soon becomes evident that we are indebted for this harmony to a small band of El Moran, Masai warriors. It is our first meeting with the then dreaded Masai; and these young bloods have strolled over from an adjacent kraal in order to demand *hongo*, a tribute for permitting us to enter their country. Firmly, but quite politely, they are informed that if it is *hongo* they seek, they have come to the wrong camp for it. Nothing abashed, and with a considerable display of dignity, they retort that the El Moran are not in the habit of letting the sun dry the dew on their bodies for nothing; and promptly return whence they had set forth.

Continuing our journey in a northerly direction up the Kedong, we pass numerous Masai kraals during the next two days. Many of the tribe are temporarily settled hereabouts, with their families and flocks and herds, in order to take advantage of the now succulent pasturage in the Kedong. A short *shauri* is held with one of their old chiefs, who stresses, in the course of the palaver, that the Masai and white men are brothers. It would be appropriate, therefore, if the white men made the Masai a present, not as *hongo*, but merely as a token of good fellowship, because they are in

Masai territory. We are touched, yet, on principle, decline to part with the goods without a *quid pro quo*. Hence it is intimated to the Masai that if they bring donkeys, milk, and hides for sale we will readily purchase them in exchange for iron wire and such other trade goods as they may desire. To this they agree, and their womenkind inundate our camp later, on barter bent.

When we reach the head of the Kedong Valley, 40 miles from Fort Smith, we obtain our first glimpse of Lake Naivasha—from an altitude of 7,000 feet above sea-level. This beautiful sheet of water is still 7 miles distant and lying 700 feet below us. It is approached by a gently falling plain of short grass, interspersed with small trees and scrub as we draw near to its shores. On the early morning miasma lifting, the scene gradually unfolded during the march is one of exquisite charm, the surface of the calm water glimmering before one as the sun steadily ascends the heavens. Camp is pitched about half a mile from the eastern margin of the lake, and approximately midway between its northern and southern extremities. A number of Masai kraals in the vicinity are still occupied, so, for better security, a strong *boma* is constructed round the camp, the brushwood and trees growing near-by being cut down for the purpose.

Since those days I have seen many entrancing

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lakes in the East ; and though as artistic gems some of the small lakes in the highlands of Japan are not easily surpassed, yet they lack the wild environment and interesting animal life then so much in evidence around Naivasha. Early loves are said to linger longest in the memory, so I may be prejudiced in regarding Naivasha as one of the most picturesque sheets of water upon which I have gazed. Nevertheless, carrying my mind back more than thirty years, I can still recall the sensation of pleasure pervading me when first we beheld the shimmering waters of Naivasha that keen April morning ; and as one became better acquainted with its beauty one's appreciation increased rather than diminished.

We subsequently made the complete circuit of this irregular, pear-shaped stretch of water, which is about twelve miles long and nine wide ; but before narrating our experiences then, let me attempt a first impression from our *boma* on its eastern shore, which served as our headquarters for the next fortnight.

We are in a volcanic region, and, looking south, we discern the tops of two extinct volcanoes of considerable size. One, Longonot, whose bare circular summit rises to an altitude of about 8,700 feet above sea-level, is distant only 10 miles from camp. To reach Naivasha we had passed close beside its barren eastern slopes ; and, when we

first clambered down into the Kedong Valley, the other volcano, Suswa, sprang up as a solitary mass out of the broad, prairie-like valley some 15 miles away to the west. The mountains and hills confronting our camp to the west and south-west seem to raise their heads aloft from the very verge of Naivasha's waters. In the former direction occasional puffs of steam may be seen to issue from the Buré heights, outlying features of the mighty Mau escarpment which bounds the Rift Valley for hundreds of miles along its western border, and here reaches an elevation of more than 10,000 feet above sea-level. Three conical peaks to the south-west are conspicuous objects of the lower landscape, and these, too, appear to rise from the lap of the lake and to define its southern limit. Here, on the east, and looking north along the shore, a gentle, grassy slope extends down to the water's edge; whilst farther back is the stately continuation of the Kikuyu range, fading away in the far north to the pencilled outlines of the forbidding Lykipia escarpment.

It is a fine setting for this mirror-like reservoir reposing at an altitude of about 6,300 feet amid these once turbulent mountains; and the view westwards at dawn across the lake, with its background of hills and the mist still hanging in the air of an April morn, is as soft a panorama as any artist could desire. Near-by is a long narrow

island, partially wooded with scrub, which has thrust itself above the surface of the lake close to the shore, and runs some distance out in crescent form as though portion of the sharp rim of an ancient crater. A smaller adjacent islet is also visible. Soundings taken from our Berthon boat show that the water at one side of these isles deepens suddenly, as if a bottomless pit lay concealed between their rocky summits.

Otherwise the lake is shallow hereabouts, and ducks innumerable are peacefully swimming to and fro, rippling its glassy surface in their active search for food. So tame at first are these waterfowl—for seldom has a gun been levelled at them—that they pay little heed to the strings of porters wending their way between the camp and the lake to fill their *kibuyus* (calabashes) with water, as their supply for the day. Here and there, too, a solitary crane may be seen preening himself whilst standing in the shallows; and now and again a flock of geese suddenly emerges from the mist and alights on the lake with a loud “swish,” causing a rare commotion for some moments.

Big game was likewise very plentiful then; and I recall how, the first morning after our arrival, I set out early for the margin of the lake from camp with nothing in my hand but a stick. When returning, a herd of several hundred zebra thundered up to within a few score yards of me. They

stopped short abruptly, and gazed at me for fully two minutes as I stood stock-still. Then, uttering their half-bark, half-whistle cry of alarm, they dashed off again on their wild career. A little later a herd of beautiful Grantii antelope galloped right across my path and less than thirty yards in front of me. The rear was brought up by a splendid buck with lovely horns, and I fear I regretted I was not carrying a rifle.

Yet there were some unpleasant associations with Naivasha, dimmed by time but brought back to mind on more searching reflections. One was the prevalence of the common house-fly. They existed everywhere throughout Masailand, countless myriads of them, born and bred amidst the cattle and flocks of that pastoral race. These flies proved a veritable plague, for they swarmed all over one's food and person, making the nose and eyes their favourite resting-place. This no doubt accounted for the almost universal habit the Masai had of "squinningy" up their eyes and looking at one through half-closed lids. It was pathetic to see the Masai children and infants with dense clusters of flies settled about both eyes. Neither they nor their mothers made the least effort to remove these disease-carrying torments—a hopeless and endless task, presumably.

We were subjected almost daily also to tremendous gales of wind towards evening. These

blew across the lake from the great mountain barrier to the west, and were of a particularly piercing nature at this high altitude. Smothering swirls of dust sometimes accompanied these gusts and found their way into our tents in a very unpleasant manner; whilst the usually glassy surface of the lake was lashed into miniature waves.

Leaving a strong party behind at the *boma*, my chief and I started on April 7th with a small caravan of Swahili porters and a few Pathans for a trip round the lake. Travelling in a south-westerly direction along the shore, during the greater part of the march of 10 miles we traversed open grassland, extending some miles inland from the water's edge to the foot-hills on our left. We dived, too, through occasional patches of wood near the margin of the lake. After tramping 7 or 8 miles we gradually swung north-west, and camped on the outskirts of a wood, just beyond the third of the conical hills which were so notable a landmark from our *boma*.

Throughout the march the shores of the lake were fringed with papyrus, indicating its shallow nature; whilst dense masses of water-lilies added a touch of colour to the scene for 30 or 40 yards out. Beyond the lilies, ducks and geese were gliding over the placid surface; and at intervals a stray hippopotamus would show up above the water with a

loud blast from his protuberant nostrils, and slowly raise his head to look at the caravan, wondering, doubtless, what this intrusion into his secluded haunt betokened.

We saw much game in the grassland, immense herds of zebra browsing unconcernedly everywhere, as well as hartebeeste, Grantii, and the attractive little Thomsoni gazelle; whilst the woods were alive with guinea-fowl. We both indulged in some shooting on the march, securing three zebra, a Thomsoni, and several guinea-fowl, so everybody had meat to add to their flour ration during the next few days.

My first zebra took a lot of killing, as he was a big, powerful stallion; and after my initial shot, which wounded him badly, I found it most difficult to manœuvre myself into a good position to finish him off, owing to the absence of cover. His vitality was amazing, and he led me a long chase, though I placed several more '450 Express bullets in him before finally settling him—much to my relief—with a shot through the neck at close quarters. On the other hand, with one '440 Winchester bullet I bagged my second zebra. As soon as I pulled the trigger he wheeled round twice and dropped. With desperate efforts he struggled to his legs, staggered about 20 yards, and fell again. He then made a third and last effort, stumbled forward about 10 yards, and

dropped down dead. He had been shot right through the heart. One small Winchester bullet had done its work here, whilst so much lead had been expended on the other animal because a vital spot had not been reached by my first shot.

A short march of $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles next day was almost entirely taken up in circumventing a long, narrow bay extending nearly due west from the main expanse of water at the south-west corner of the lake. Immediately on leaving camp that morning we encountered very rough going, the track winding amongst low, irregular, rocky hillocks, and leading up to high ground which overlooked the picturesque bay. Descending gradually from a height of more than 100 feet above the lake, we plunged into a romantic wood of luxuriant foliage with great creepers trailing in all directions from the trees. The overgrown path ran close to the water's edge and its fringe of papyrus, and led us on to a narrow, open grassy plain between the low hills and the lake. At the extreme head of the bay was a large mud flat, resembling a landing-stage, on which immense numbers of ducks and geese were basking in the sun. Though remote from our *boma* camp, they proved to be exceedingly wild, and took to the water on our approach with an outburst of vociferous quacking, while the ungainly multitude waddled away from the shore.

We camped at the head of the bay, as we wished

to investigate a valley leading towards the Mau escarpment before nightfall, there being a possibility that the intended railway to Lake Victoria might have to follow it. Next day, too, we halted in order to examine still more closely our surroundings. My chief surveyed the area about the Ndabibi plain, which runs almost due north between the foot of lofty Mau and a low range bordering the lake. Its grassy expanse was dotted with numerous patches of shady woods affording grateful shelter to game, which literally swarmed within this secluded sanctuary. And it was in this neighbourhood that we first came across Impalah antelope in any numbers. They are beautiful creatures, a rich chestnut in colour, and carry particularly shapely horns. When alarmed they literally bounce up and down off the ground to a great height and in a peculiarly graceful manner.

That evening an urgent message by runners from the *boma* decided my chief to return there, and to leave me to complete the survey round the lake. We parted next morning, and I continued with only sixteen porters and the Pathans. We were not sorry to abandon our camp of the last two nights, for the demoniacal laughter of hyenas and the dismal wails of jackals prowling around it had contrived to make the hours of darkness spent there not altogether reposeful after the labours of the day. In spite of the plenitude of game here-

abouts, however, I do not remember to have seen or heard a lion in the vicinity, though my chief came across a leopard, when returning to camp at dusk, carrying off a gazelle in its mouth.

We accomplished a march of about 10 miles in a northerly direction, during the first half of which we saw little of the lake, for the precipitous nature of the cliffs arising from it compelled us to traverse undulating grassland somewhat inland. Large troops of baboons were clambering about the rocky hill-slopes around us. Great ugly brutes they were, and had a reputation for extreme ferocity among our much-travelled porters. These averred that no lion durst interfere with their gambols, as the baboons would at once swarm about him like hornets and overwhelm him by their strength and solid weight of numbers.

We became badly bogged later in a swamp which ran a considerable distance inland, and had to retrace our footsteps in order to work round it. Towards the end of the march we passed through a long, shady wood, with broken hills close to our left and the lake immediately to our right, before reaching a small grassy plain on which zebra and Thomsoni were grazing. I was too much occupied with the survey work in this intricate ground to indulge in shooting, so lent Sali, our interpreter, one of my rifles to try his luck. This youth had accompanied Stanley through Darkest Africa a few

years before, and had then been taken to England by that great explorer. He was an extraordinarily keen youngster and was always ready to pursue game, but unfortunately his enthusiasm surpassed his skill with the rifle, and he met with no success on this occasion. He was subsequently drowned during the expedition, in the Nzoia river in Kavirondo, whilst attempting to swim across encumbered with a Martini rifle and ammunition.

The grunts and blowings of hippos amidst the deeper pools, hidden by the inevitable papyrus, formed one of the features of this camp, but it was impossible to get a sight of them. Nevertheless, the mouths of the porters absolutely watered with eager anticipation when a nearer bellow than usual raised the faint hope that a bullet might find its way to the brain of the noisy monster, and that they would dine on his fat carcase that evening.

Off again early next morning, we were glad to get into our stride, for the air was bitterly keen before the sun made his warmth felt, and the porters crouched shivering over the embers of their fires until all were ready for the road. About midday, on the other hand, with the sun high in the heavens, the heat became more than genial.

We were now approaching the northern limits of Naivasha, and the entire march of 11 miles was occupied in working round a long, narrow bay

running almost due north and covered with numerous islands of papyrus. On leaving camp, we struck slightly inland over a low col in a rocky spur jutting out into the lake. By a rough, stony cattle-track we crossed the hills bordering the lake on its western shore, and descended into grassland near the water's edge. Here we encountered mosquitoes of a most fanatical type. In spite of it being broad daylight and the sun well up, these pests issued in clouds out of the reeds and settled on all exposed portions of our persons; and there they allowed themselves to be slaughtered wholesale, without making the least attempt to escape the avenging hand, so intent were they on regaling themselves on the blood of our vile bodies.

Proceeding over the grassland, we reached the northern extremity of the bay, where the Gilgil stream flows into the lake. It was now a sluggish, insignificant water-way, about 12 feet wide and a foot deep at the point crossed, meandering through a low-lying, swampy tract. This provided excellent pasturage, however, and large numbers of Masai were temporarily located at the head of the bay grazing their grand herds of cattle and countless sheep and goats. Whilst the caravan was making one of its periodical halts near the Gilgil, a band of El Moran suddenly appeared upon the scene in full war-kit. They were waving their spears and shields aloft as they

gaily danced towards us, chanting their *hongo* song. Although informed we were not travelling for the pleasure of paying *hongo*, they, nevertheless, became quite friendly, and voluntarily treated us to songs and dances for the remainder of the time we rested.

They were fine, athletic, long-limbed, young fellows, and entirely nude save for a tan-coloured piece of cloth which trailed behind them in the breeze, or a flap of hide worn jauntily over one shoulder. Their bodies and hair were dyed a reddish-chocolate hue and glistened in the sun, owing to the liberal mixture of cow's fat with the particular clay utilized for the dye. Their long hair was twisted into numerous mop-like cords, which were gathered together behind and secured with thongs to form a pig-tail. A similar, but shorter, forelock fell gracefully over their foreheads. Some of these warrior dandies sported rakish ruffles of vulture feathers, nigh three feet in diameter, round their necks; whilst others had bedecked themselves with a kind of hood of erect ostrich feathers fastened under the chin. This adornment naturally added considerably to their stature and was intended to increase their ferocity of mien.

In their hands they carried their famous spears and their long, oval-shaped, buffalo-hide shields, decorated with heraldic designs in red, sepia, and

black on a white background. Their armament was completed by a knobkerry thrust into one side of a belt fashioned with leathern thongs and girt about singularly slender waists; whilst their *simés*, heavy, short-bladed swords and spatulate in shape, occupied a like position on the other side of the body.

Minor adornments consisted of tassels of iron chain depending from their greatly distended earlobes, necklets of iron wire chain, bracelets of iron wire, and ornaments of horn, or bands of small cowrie shells, about the biceps. Strips of the black and white skin of the beautiful colobus monkey were worn round the ankles after the manner of spurs, and other strips bound just below the knee.

Thus arrayed in their full war-paint, these young Masai warriors created an imposing impression of vigorous manhood. Their songs and dances, too, were of a highly entertaining character, and when we continued our march we thanked the El Moran warmly for their lively performance. As we moved off they departed again to their flocks and kraals, seemingly fully satisfied with having provided so much amusement during our rest on the road.

Turning almost due south now, we proceeded for another 3 miles through tracts of scrub and grass before camping a few hundred yards from the

margin of the lake. Whilst pitching camp the head Pathan with me reported that one of their number was missing. A small party was at once sent off to search for him, but without success. Still, we were only some 10 miles distant here from our *boma* camp, so hoped the absentee would have the good sense to find his way there by following the shore of the lake—if he were not speared by the Masai.

After marching some miles in an easterly direction next morning through scrub and thinly wooded country, we reached and crossed the River Morendat. It was a fine stream, about 30 feet wide and then 2 feet deep, flowing between well-defined banks bordered with trees and dense creeper-like bushes. Naivasha is entirely fed by the Gilgil and Morendat, and though their waters are quite fresh it is a curious fact that no fish exist in the lake; yet the smallest streams in East Africa usually abound with them.

A short distance on we entered a conspicuous belt of trees, on the outskirts of which a Swahili trading caravan was camped; and near-by we came across the Pathan lost the previous day. We had fired rifles at intervals during the march to attract his attention should he be in the neighbourhood, but were greatly surprised to alight suddenly upon him walking between three stately Masai, two El Moran and an El Moru—the latter

a married Masai, and therefore regarded as in the sere and yellow.

It then transpired that the Pathan had been seized with a sharp attack of colic the previous day. Without informing anyone of the fact, the stupid fellow lay down early in the march and fell asleep—apparently for some hours. When he awoke the caravan was nowhere in sight; and after wandering about for a long while he encountered these Masai towards nightfall. By signs he made them understand he had lost his way and was hungry. Instead of spearing him—their usual procedure in those unregenerate days towards interlopers—the Masai took him off to their kraal, killed a goat, handed him chunks of it roasted on the ends of their spears, showed him where to sleep, and set off that morning with him for our *boma* camp.

Such unlooked-for behaviour on their part was well worthy of reward, so I intimated to them that if they would accompany us to headquarters they should there receive presents. We were distant only 5 miles from it now, and marching south along the narrow, grassy plain between the lake and the low, stony escarpment on our left, we joined our chief and the other officers of the expedition a couple of hours later. The Masai then each received several yards of white cloth embellished with red designs, chains of iron wire, and some

coils of iron wire. These simple gifts pleased them beyond words, as iron wire was much valued by them for the fashioning of their splendid spears; whilst they indulged in most laughable antics after wrapping the cloth round their naked bodies, for they kept admiring themselves after the manner of ladies in a new gown before a cheval-glass. They set out for their kraal radiantly happy, the two young bloods with their new garments trailing bravely in the breeze, in order, doubtless, to create a furore on their arrival among the Dittoes, the unmarried girls with whom they shared their kraals. But one could not help wondering what the Pathan's views of life were during the night spent by him alone in a Masai kraal. He was probably glad to rejoin us.

The circuit of the lake by the route followed proved to be 46 miles in all. Fresh and enchanting scenes of water, wood, and mountain had presented themselves throughout, whilst we surveyed Nai-vasha's charms from many different angles. We remained some days longer on its shores, stocking a food depot on the summit of Mau beyond the Ndabibi plain. As this task was entrusted to me, I traversed the plains at the south end of the lake several times and enjoyed much good shooting before we finally left for Uganda. From the point where the forest of Mau is entered, on the Sotik route to the Victoria Nyanza, a superb view is

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obtained of Naivasha, lying more than 2,000 feet below and backed by the lofty Aberdare range to the east, extending many miles in an unbroken line from north to south.

Though keenly looking forward to an examination of the little-known country stretching between us and Lake Victoria, by the route it was our purpose to follow, it was with sincere regret that my companion and I bade adieu to Naivasha, and plunged into the gloom of the dank, primeval forest which let the curtain down on this wonderful panorama.

Four months later, on our return from Uganda by yet another route, we were held up several days by the swollen condition of the Morendat river. Our food supply was then nearly exhausted, and the caravan was largely dependent on the game secured by our rifles. Thus there was much satisfaction in finding that the neighbourhood of Naivasha was capable of providing us with the wherewithal to exist whilst waiting for the waters to subside.

After an interval of five years Naivasha again burst upon my view, when the Macdonald Expedition of 1897-1899 passed along its shores bound for the territories to the north. Beyond the fact that a Government post was now established on the low, stony escarpment near the eastern margin of the lake, little change was noticeable in its charming

environment. But big game had moved farther afield, so, whilst encamped for a week on its shores, during our return journey in 1899, I conducted two officers of the expedition on a shooting trip to the Ndabibi plain at the south-west corner of the lake. Here, off the beaten track of the now frequent caravans passing up and down the road between the coast and Uganda, game was as plentiful as in the halcyon days of 1892, and we enjoyed excellent sport in the few days we were able to spare for that purpose.

When last I traversed the shores of that beauty spot, however, at the close of a long trek from the Sudan via Lake Rudolf in 1901, it was in the comparative comfort of a train from Nakuru—then railhead. We were hurried indecently past familiar attractive scenes of early East African days. Nature had been conquered. Little or no game was now to be seen in the vicinity of the line about Naivasha. Crowds of Indian coolies constructing the railway were obtruded on the once restful landscape instead. The romance of Naivasha had fled.

WRECKED BY A BERTHON BOAT

The visit last year to London of Ras Tafari, the Prince Regent and heir-apparent to the throne of Abyssinia, recalled to my mind certain experiences in the country whence he came. Although a considerable time has passed since I first set foot in Abyssinia, I am still convinced that such difficulties as then arose with the authorities, on the western confines of that country, were chiefly brought about by our possession of a Berthon boat, which formed an indispensable part of the equipment of the expedition commanded by me.

The innocent cause of the trouble was nothing much to look at, either. Just the ordinary brown canvas collapsible Berthon boat in two 6-foot sections, which, with its bottom-boards, seats and oars, formed a convenient load, when folded up, for a camel on the line of march.

To make my story clear, I must carry the reader back to the excitement raised by the Fashoda incident, which so nearly resulted in a rupture of friendly relations between the French and ourselves in 1898. It will be remembered that immediately

after Lord Kitchener defeated the Khalifa's hosts in the Sudan, at the Battle of Omdurman, he learnt that a French expedition under the command of Captain Marchand was in occupation of the dismal mud fort at Fashoda, set in the midst of swamp far to the south of Omdurman.

The object of the French was plain. They desired to establish a belt of French territory right across the African continent from their western possessions in the French Sudan to Abyssinia, thus barring free access to Britain along the Nile from the reconquered Sudan to Uganda.

Although Marchand reached his objective on the Nile from the west, after overcoming great physical difficulties, and was firmly entrenched at Fashoda by the time Omdurman was occupied by British troops, the other French missions working westwards from Abyssinia, with the active help of the Abyssinians, failed to join hands with Marchand by way of the Sobat, or Baro river. The intended French occupation of this belt of country prior to the arrival of the British never materialized, therefore; and the French ultimately withdrew their ill-advised claim to, and unjustifiable effort to appropriate, this dreary waste.

The difficulty with the French being satisfactorily removed, it remained for the Sudan Government to consolidate its position *vis-à-vis* the Abyssinians, whose boundaries were now coterminous with its

own in the newly opened-out areas of the Sudan. And with the object of arriving at some general idea of how the future boundary between Abyssinia and the Sudan should run—south-east of Omdurman to the confines of British East Africa—two survey parties left England in the autumn of 1899 for the Sudan, in order to prosecute these investigations. The special area to be examined by mine was along the Sobat river, and southwards to the north of Lake Rudolf—the latter a point reached by me the previous year from British East Africa.

We were delayed a little time on arrival at Omdurman by the final bid of the Khalifa, who had escaped from the battlefield of Omdurman the year before, to recover his lost provinces ; and it was not until his defeat and death at Gadeed that we were able to obtain the use of the gunboat *Tamai* and barges to steam off up the White Nile. On December 2nd, however, we finally got under way, the gun-boat, with a double-decked barge and two *gyassahs* lashed on each side of her, accommodating the whole expedition. It was a tight fit, though, as in addition to Major Bright of the Rifle Brigade and myself, and our servants and interpreters, we had to stow away a Sudanese officer, and twenty-two N.C.O.'s and men of the Eleventh Sudanese Battalion, twenty-four ex-dervishes, locally known as Jehadia, who were enlisted as transport drivers, seven camels, ten

mules, and one hundred and thirty donkeys, besides equipment and three months' rations for the entire party.

Our immediate objective was Nasser Post, more than 200 miles beyond Fashoda and situated on the left bank of the Sobat river, about 170 miles above its junction with the White Nile. We had hoped to be able to take the gun-boat and barges as far as Nasser, but unfortunately the Sobat proved to be lower for the season of year than anticipated. We were compelled, therefore, after a river journey of some 600 miles, to commence disembarking on December 19th, about 75 miles short of Nasser. On the 22nd we sent the gun-boat, barge and *gyassahs* back to Omdurman, lest they should become stranded by the rapidly falling stream.

More than a week was spent at the disembarkation camp, in order to get the animals into condition after being cooped up for so long aboard. We did not reach the small Nasser post in Nuer territory, therefore, until the early days of January, 1900. Continuing the march, we found ourselves confronted, a few days later, by the Pibor river, which enters the Sobat from the marshes to the south, some 20 miles east of Nasser. As it proved unfordable, our invaluable Berthon boat was unshipped from the back of our most sturdy camel to assist in the crossing.

The obstacle was an awkward one, and we were

occupied for more than six hours in transporting the whole expedition to the far bank. At the junction of the Pibor with the Sobat there was, luckily, a fair-sized island which we utilized for the crossing. Between the near bank and the island, a distance of from 50 to 60 yards, was shoal water waist deep, with comparatively firm bottom ; so we were able to make considerable use of the camels and mules to carry the loads to the island. On the far side, however, the channel was out of one's depth and 30 yards wide ; so a ferry was established for the Berthon boat by stretching a rope cable from bank to bank. Two men seated in the boat then hauled her along the rope backwards and forwards with their hands.

The carrying capacity of the Berthon boat proved a pleasant surprise, for although only 12 feet in length, she took about a dozen donkey loads over each trip ; and at the end, when all the loads had been ferried across, she made her final trip with no fewer than ten men packed aboard her.

The most exhilarating performance was, undoubtedly, getting the animals across the obstacle. All but our goats and sheep had to swim for it, in batches ; and camels, mules and donkeys can be about as stupid and perverse as any creatures on earth when asked to take to water. The undertaking was certainly entertaining, but at times thoroughly exasperating ; for the far bank of the

stream was extremely boggy, and when the animals realized this from mid-stream by seeing their advanced companions in difficulties on landing, they promptly made efforts to turn in their tracks and regain the shore whence they had set forth on their swim. The yelling, shouting and vituperation on the banks of the Pibor that morning resembled pandemonium let loose, and attracted many naked Nuers to the scene; but the Sudanese rose to the occasion and worked grandly. Regardless of self, they plunged about in the mud without a stitch of clothing on, and man-handled each individual camel, mule and donkey out of the morass in which they were floundering about in a hopeless and helpless manner. The men really seemed to enjoy their mud-larking; but the same can hardly be said of the animals, which appeared much subdued when they emerged on firm ground again.

We were not called upon to use the Berthon boat again for some time, and continued on the even tenor of our way up the Baro—by which name the Sobat is known above its junction with the Pibor—towards the Abyssinian mountains. By January 26th we had traversed the great open grass plains extending from the Nile to the Abyssinian foot-hills, and about 150 miles from Nasser entered the commencement of the Baro gorge. A few miles farther up we lighted on Marchand's steam-launch the *Faidherbe*, which

that intrepid explorer had been forced to abandon at this point as navigation was impossible beyond, owing to rapids and huge boulders in the bed of the stream.

It may be remembered that when Marchand was compelled to evacuate Fashoda, Lord Kitchener generously offered to convey him and his expedition in British gun-boats down the Nile, and so back to the Mediterranean. But so disgusted was Marchand that all his labour and toil on behalf of his country had resulted in nought that he refused the offer, and decided to make for the French port of Jibuti on the Red Sea by crossing Abyssinia. He steamed up the Nile, therefore, from Fashoda in the *Faidherbe*, towing several steel barges, all of which had, after herculean efforts, been transported by him in sections across half Africa to the Nile.

Turning up the Sobat, Marchand and his disappointed companions continued some 350 miles up that river through a dead flat uninteresting expanse of grass plains and swamps, almost devoid of trees, until further progress by water became impracticable. There Marchand sank his barges in the river, and hauled the *Faidherbe* on to a small wooded island in the gorge, securing this trusty comrade of his famous African adventure by iron chains to neighbouring trees. He then constructed a grass hut over the entire 50-foot length of her hull.

And thus we found the noted launch, 15 to 20 feet above the then level of the river, comfortably housed and intact; for those Anuaks who guided us to the spot would not approach the steamer closely, evidently regarding the place as holy ground. It was in truth a lovely spot, the river tumbling past the island in great cascades of milky foam, whilst its banks were richly clad in vegetation. That island camp of Marchand's on the Baro probably still holds many sad associations for him of his fine achievement; and we may be certain that it was with a twinge he bade farewell to the faithful *Faidherbe* as he faced the climb to the summit of the Abyssinian escarpment towering far above him.

On our return from Abyssinia two and a half months later, however, large numbers of Abyssinians and Gallas had descended from the highlands to dissect the *Faidherbe*, and were endeavouring to convey her in sections to the capital at Addis Abeba, whence she was to be removed by the French to Paris for the great Exhibition held that year. In the autumn I visited the Paris Exhibition of 1900, but saw no signs of the *Faidherbe* there; so presume the difficulties in transporting the sections across Abyssinia to Europe in the time available had proved insuperable.

After passing the site of the *Faidherbe* the track became stony, crossed many undulations in the

foot-hills, and traversed thick woods, through portions of which we had to cut a way for our transport animals. On February 2nd we reached the base of the lofty escarpment, which abruptly separates the highlands of Abyssinia, hereabouts, from the low-lying plains of the Sudan. We were in the act of ferrying the expedition across the Baro in our Berthon boat next day, prior to making the ascent to the plateau, 3,000 feet above us, when we received a letter from an Abyssinian official, Kanyazmach Walda Gabriel by name. The Abyssinians had heard of the approach of our expedition, and this official, who was acting as Governor of the Goré district, wrote to say that everything we required would be provided for us in the way of food, drink and Galla porters, to enable us to reach Goré.

We soon found that the ascent with laden animals, accustomed only to the plains of the Sudan, was beyond the compass of our transport. The first day we reached, with great difficulty and with the help of hundreds of Gallas, a rocky nullah about 1,400 feet above the Baro, abandoning *en route* a mule and two donkeys which were unequal to the strain. But the final ascent of 1,800 feet in less than two miles next day was too much for the animals. All had to be unloaded, and their loads carried up by Gallas. Even so, the camels were not got to the summit until two days later ;

and then the finest of the seven, he who had proudly carried the Berthon boat in the plains, succumbed to his efforts before reaching the top.

But once on the top the prospect was beautiful. We were over 5,000 feet above sea-level, and the view from our lofty position was grand in the extreme, especially across the deep Baro and Birbir gorges lying so far below us; and the climate was exhilarating.

The Abyssinians were most effusive in their attentions, but became somewhat tiresome in their impatience for me to press on to Goré. They appeared to imagine that it was quite unnecessary to trouble about the welfare of our humble four-footed carriers after the tremendous exertions they had undergone during the past few days. Their idea of the duties of the leader of an expedition was, seemingly, that he should let the show look after itself, whilst he placed himself on a pedestal and remained sublimely aloof from the problems confronting the undertaking. That, needless to say, was not my conception of the part; and as the future success of the expedition largely depended upon our animals recovering their strength and condition before a forward move over the difficult country still ahead of us could be made, I was unable to accede to Abyssinian importunity in this matter.

After a few days' rest we took the road again,

having arranged for the camel loads to be carried by Gallas, as our ships of the desert were quite done and barely capable of carrying themselves over the hilly tracks of the uplands. Without wearying the reader with accounts of the various receptions and meetings with fresh Abyssinian officials during our progress to Goré, I will merely say that our way lay through charming country which forcibly reminded us of parts of England, with its leafy lanes, green turf, woodland dells and running streams. But the cold at nights at these high altitudes told seriously on our animals; they continued to lose condition rapidly, and daily more deaths occurred among them.

The night before reaching Goré we camped on the bank of the Gomorro river, which flowed through a swampy hollow some 1,100 feet below the summit of the ridge on which that settlement was situated. Next day we were accorded a State reception on breasting the summit by Kanyazmach Walda Gabriel, who was accompanied by many officers and several hundred Abyssinian soldiers lining the plateau. A pleasant camp site had been set aside for us, and presents in the shape of a fatted ox, bread, fowls, eggs, and jars of "marisa" and "asalia"—drinks made from grain and honey respectively—were showered upon the expedition by orders of the acting-Governor. In short, everything was extremely sociable and friendly.

Our entrance to Goré had originally been intended by me as a stepping-stone towards Lake Rudolf, via the Abyssinian plateau ; but subsequent events converted it into the farthest point penetrated by us on the western confines of Abyssinia. This outpost is situated on a horse-shoe shaped ridge over 6,500 feet above sea-level, and commands an extensive view of the country round. The huts and habitations, constructed chiefly of reeds and grass, were scattered along the summit of the ridge and down the grassy slopes enclosed within the horse-shoe. Despite Abyssinian passion for outward show and pomp, even the most exalted officials lived in a very humble style with their families, as they appeared to share their homes with servants, horses, mules and donkeys ; whilst their goats and sheep strolled in and out of them at will.

These Abyssinians were, however, very self-opinionated, probably because well armed with magazine rifles after their recent victory over the Italians at Adowa. And though they prized ammunition highly, they seldom hesitated to waste it in a senseless and dangerous manner. No celebration or feast was complete without a reckless firing off of rifles, the bullets from which on several occasions passed unpleasantly close to our tents, during the latter part of our stay at Goré—not altogether unintentionally, I fear. As

for the officers, they rarely moved about, no matter how insignificant their rank, without a train of armed followers.

Kanyazmach Walda Gabriel, with whom our further experience in Abyssinia chiefly lay, appeared to be a comparatively young man, slight of build, and with keen pock-marked face. In the early days of our acquaintance he gave us the impression of being able to enjoy a joke as much as anyone; but we found later than his initially smiling exterior concealed a mean, covetous spirit.

Various interchanges of visits took place during the first few days, and at the close of one of his visits to our camp, Walda Gabriel asked if he might see our Berthon boat put together, as he had heard astonishing accounts of a boat we had which folded up into two flat packages for carriage on a camel. The Abyssinians who had met us whilst ferrying across the Baro evidently took stock of the wonder, and at once informed the acting-Governor of our possession. When it was opened out and fitted together ready for launching, in his presence, he marvelled greatly at the ingenuity of its design. He kept impressing on us that their former French visitors possessed nothing so wonderful as this canvas craft. But little did we then understand how his covetousness had been aroused by this simple display of one of our most indispensable belongings.

Meanwhile, our transport animals had suffered much during our brief residence in the highlands, to the cold of which they were quite unaccustomed. They began to die off at an alarming rate, and I soon realized that to continue my journey to Lake Rudolf through this elevated and difficult country with animals of the plains was out of the question. I wished, therefore, to replenish my sadly depleted numbers by purchasing mules and donkeys in the Goré market, with a view to returning speedily to the plains and continuing our journey south at the foot of the Abyssinian escarpment. I explained the whole situation to Walda Gabriel, and requested him to place every facility at my disposal to expedite these most essential purchases. The rainy season was rapidly approaching, and we wanted to be clear of the mountains before it descended upon us.

It was now that our host clearly displayed the cloven hoof. Imagining that we were completely in his power, he indulged in every mean artifice and subterfuge—through the instrumentality of a certain cunning confidant, Lijlama by name—to obstruct us, short of open hostility to the expedition. In fact, the outlook at length became so bad for the future of the expedition that I had to resort to trickery myself, in order to get a letter through to Captain Harrington (now Sir John), the British Consul-General at Addis Abeba, setting

forth the delinquencies of Walda Gabriel for the information of King Menelek.

I had presented handsome gifts, brought from England, to Walda Gabriel and his chief officers ; and had set aside a gold watch, rifle, etc., for Dejjaj Tassama, the Governor of the province, who was unfortunately absent at the capital, whither he had been summoned by the King. But none of these things satisfied Walda Gabriel. Ultimately, that worthy bluntly demanded that I should leave the Berthon boat behind for Dejjaj Tassama. He repeated that that was the most wonderful boat they had ever seen ; and if Dejjaj Tassama could present it to the King, Menelek would, in truth, be overcome ; for the boats the French had were not to be compared with it.

I immediately asked the knave how he supposed I could cross the Baro, Pibor, and other rivers likely to be met with in our further travels, if the Berthon boat were left at Goré. We might just as well give up all idea of continuing the journey as to part with our boat. Nevertheless, he could write and tell Dejjaj Tassama about it, and if the Governor so desired it, I would arrange to send him a similar boat on our return to England. Being such a liar himself, this he did not believe. " Give me that boat," he said, " and I will supply you with animals and Gallas sufficient to take your expedition anywhere through Abyssinia."

But having found the man to be an inveterate Ananias, I placed no credence in his promises; and, in any case, had not the faintest intention of parting with my priceless pearl.

Yet we were in a bad hole. The effusive assistance thrust upon us to get us to Goré was in amazing contrast to the obstructions placed in our path for getting away again to the Baro. Mules and donkeys were covertly prevented from being brought round to our camp for sale, in spite of the high prices we were, perforce, prepared to pay for them in Maria Theresa dollars brought from Omdurman. Not a Galla porter would Walda Gabriel furnish, although hundreds had previously been at our disposal to bring us to Goré. And our transport animals were dying like flies. It seemed doubtful if we could rely on getting fifty donkeys out of our original one hundred and thirty back to the plains carrying loads.

The situation was rapidly approaching an impasse; so I decided that, while there was yet time, we must employ such animals as remained to transport our loads by relays to Buré, the summit camp overlooking the Baro, where the grazing was abundant. Without mentioning in detail the many obstructive restrictions imposed on us, and how we were compelled to counter acts of low cunning, three weeks after the first advanced party was dispatched from Goré with a portion of our

loads, the whole expedition was reunited again at the summit camp. We had spent anxious days throughout this period, as we were never quite sure what the next unfriendly act would be towards the small parties we had strung out between Goré and Buré. The Berthon boat, however, never left our camp at Goré until I was able to accompany it myself on the final 42-miles trek back to the summit camp; and I retain a lively recollection of the look of disgust on the face of Walda Gabriel when he came to wish me good-bye at Goré shortly before our departure, and saw us busy with the boat. We were taking all the bottom boards and seats out of her to lighten her for mule transport; and then, hoisting the two sections on the back of the strongest remaining mule, were off!

On wishing us good-bye, Gabriel expressed the hope that the Almighty would watch over us during our journey and bring us safely back to our homes; which pious prayer struck Bright and me as something near akin to blasphemy, seeing the obstructions that he himself had placed in the way of our enjoying a safe journey.

March 31st, 1900, then, saw the whole expedition once more reunited at the summit camp, after being split up for nearly three weeks; and so overjoyed were the Sudanese who had been employed on advance work that, on our arrival with the Berthon boat and the final portion of the expedition, they

smothered my hands with kisses when we sailed in safe and sound.

We were able now to take complete stock of our possessions, and the situation by which we were confronted. Out of our original one hundred and thirty Omdurman donkeys, we had lost eighty by death since entering Abyssinian territory; and succeeded in purchasing thirty-eight only from local sources to replace them. Of our ten mules, seven had died, and we had been able to buy three only to make good the loss; whilst of our seven camels, two only remained. Thus our carrying power had been reduced by nearly half, during the seven weeks we had been compelled to sojourn among the Abyssinians. Still, by making double trips, we had managed to transport all our gear, with the exception of spare camel-saddles, our tables, and a few other things which we had burnt rather than leave behind for the sharks responsible for our difficulties.

We remained halted on April 1st, and still further reduced our belongings by burning; for though hundreds of Gallas were now proceeding empty-handed down the escarpment, past our camp, to bring up the *Faidherbe* in portions, not one would the Abyssinians, by the order of Walda Gabriel, place at our disposal. Strange contrast to our triumphal entry into Abyssinia!

Hence, we were faced with the 3,000-feet descent

to the Baro unaided. So next day I dispatched thirty-three of our Abyssinian donkeys, fully loaded, to the old half-way camp to the Baro. These donkeys, being excellent hill-climbers, were back at the summit camp by 4 p.m., and a small guard left at the depot established 1,800 feet below. The following day the manœuvre was repeated, the three Abyssinian mules also carrying down loads; whilst our two sole remaining camels were started off too. The camels had not got far before the four men in charge sent back to camp for assistance, as one of the ungainly creatures had had a fall, and was wedged in between some trees, whence they were unable to extricate him. And that was not the end of his troubles, for his next exploit was to fall down a "khud" and break his neck; so only one camel eventually reached the Baro.

The Abyssinian mules and donkeys were back at the summit camp by half-past four, and we then sent the fifty surviving Omdurman donkeys down to the half-way depot, travelling empty; but even so three of them had to be abandoned, as they proved unequal to the exertion required of them. The two sections of the Berthon boat were also carried down to the depot camp by our Jehadia that evening. It was a cheerful undertaking, this descent. Still, we were getting along by degrees.

Next morning Bright started off early from the

summit camp to supervise the descent with as many loaded Omdurman donkeys as possible from the depot camp to the Baro—the latter stage being far less formidable than the descent from the summit to the depot. I started later with all the Abyssinian mules and donkeys fully laden from the summit, thus clearing out everything left at that camp; and with this convoy made the entire descent of 3,200 feet to the Baro.

These Abyssinian animals were absolute “tigers” on the hillsides; and in spite of the extremely steep descent of 1,800 feet in $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles of rough broken track, we reached the depot camp intact at 9 a.m. Leaving the guard in charge of the loads the Omdurman donkeys had been unable to clear from there, we pushed on again after a short halt, and reached the Baro about midday—a hot and trying descent of some six miles from the summit.

Bright had safely convoyed his Omdurman animals from the depot camp, and arrived at the Baro about an hour and a half before me. He spoke hopefully of the Omdurman loaded donkeys, so there was some life still left in the remnants. The Berthon boat had been brought down too by the Jehadia; and next day the Abyssinian donkeys returned to the depot camp to bring down the loads yet remaining there. We could now regard the descent of the escarpment as conquered, and

were not a little elated with the result of our own unaided efforts. But the mere mention of the word "Habshi" (Abyssinian) fairly stank in the nostrils of our Sudanese.

We had not yet seen the last of these gentry, though; for Walda Gabriel and others had followed us later from Goré. They continued past our summit camp, after begging quinine from us to keep away fever during their visit to the *Faidherbe* in the gorge below.

The day following the concentration of the expedition on the Baro was spent in ferrying it across to the left bank of the river—here about 40 yards wide—by means of the Berthon boat and cable. Close to our camp on the right bank were portions of the *Faidherbe*, stacked ready to be carried up the escarpment; and one section appeared to be almost half of the outer shell of the launch. The transport of this, by scores of Gallas, from the island on which she was beached must already have been a tremendous undertaking, owing to the difficulties of this 28 miles of track; but these difficulties would pale into insignificance when the actual ascent of the escarpment was embarked upon.

And so the route between the site of the *Faidherbe* and the Baro ford near us was fairly buzzing with Abyssinians and Gallas; but none deigned to offer us any help.

However, the expedition safely across the Baro, we congratulated ourselves that the worst of our troubles were over ; but we were not yet out of the wood. As the weather seemed set fine, our new camp was ordered to be pitched, as a temporary measure, close to the river under a charming glade of trees, which afforded a welcome shade from the heat of the sun. Whilst this was being done, Bright and I proceeded about a mile up the river in the afternoon to shoot a hippo or two as meat for the men. On our return we found that the Sudanese officer had pitched our two tents, end-on together, on a sandy patch just below the junction of several small nullahs, and almost on a level with the Baro. But it was getting too late then to alter this arrangement, as darkness was approaching.

During our frugal dinner we were visited by a terrific thunderstorm, accompanied by a torrential deluge of rain on the hills surrounding us. In an incredibly short time the numerous small nullahs came down in spate ; and before one hardly realized what was happening a broad stream of water, a foot to 18 inches in depth, was coursing with tremendous velocity through our two tents. These came down with a run, whilst we made wild grabs for boots, socks, boxes, tables, chairs and aluminium 'mess-ware, which were all careering away towards the Baro, and

were only rescued with the greatest difficulty. Our men were soon diving about in every direction, hauling our boxes, rifles, bedding, etc., out of the débris on to the higher ground near. It seemed in the darkness as though the Baro itself were coming down in flood.

Another powerful stream descended from the hills to dash against the stack of loads, provisions, and so forth, near-by; but the men, stark naked, and by dint of herculean efforts, saved all the saddle-loads of supplies and gear, though some of them suffered considerably as a result of their ducking. Several of the Sudanese bivouacking on the low ground beneath the trees lost their belts and ammunition, and were only able to rescue their rifles and kits by rapid action.

The intense darkness following the vivid lightning and downpour made it most difficult to find anything; but when the elements had subsided somewhat, and we had assured ourselves of the safety of the Berthon boat, food and most essentials, many anxious inquiries burst forth from Bright and myself: "Where have the theodolites got to?" "Are my rifles all right?" "Have you come across my camp-bed yet?" And so on, as we searched amid the débris of mud, grass and twigs by the fitful light of our hurricane lamps.

One of my tin boxes, containing all my astronomical notes, chronometers, maps and diary, had

been carried a distance of 20 or 30 yards out of my tent, and washed up against a chance log, just short of the river—a wonderful escape of the results of all survey-work done to date. It was, indeed, a night of misery.

Happily, the next day broke gloriously fine; and then the scene of woe was fully disclosed to our sleepless eyes. We were able, however, to wash tents, bedding and other mud-begrimed articles in the river; and to get our belongings ship-shape by spreading them out over neighbouring bushes to dry in the sun.

Whilst engaged in this laundry work, we were visited by that little serpent, Walda Gabriel, on his way back from the French boat to Goré. He looked as sick as death to find that we had got out of the country, in spite of his machinations; so I imagine he fondly hoped the descent to the Baro would defeat us, without Galla aid; and this, of course, he never had any intention of giving, unless we handed over the Berthon boat to him as a *quid pro quo*. He doubtless enjoyed, however, the spectacle of washing day in camp, and graciously inquired after the results of the storm.

The cur now evidently feared that, as we were leaving the country, I would report unfavourably about him. He was not far wrong. I had already done so; and through his own post and hands,

too, though he was still sublimely ignorant of the fact. During the afternoon he sent several deputations of officers across the river to our camp, to express his sorrow that flour, sheep and other things ordered by his chief, Dejaj Tassama, from Addis Abeba, had not been given to us for our further journey.

The number of plausible yarns and lies spun to us was nauseating; and finally I could not refrain from asking one of his emissaries whether he thought I was a child that I should swallow such senseless stories. With some warmth I pointed out, that in spite of Walda Gabriel's oft-repeated promises to supply us with food, Galla porters, etc., and notwithstanding that Gallas had been proceeding down the escarpment daily, empty-handed, no help on our further journey had been given us beyond the provision of thirteen bags of musty flour, which were unfit for human consumption.

That caught them rather on the raw; and Walda Gabriel calmly sent a message later, asking me to cross the river and visit him in his camp. This I declined to do, but said I would see him in mine if he cared to come. He arrived shortly before dark, and appeared thoroughly ill at ease during the interview. He again made promises to send food, porters, etc., after us, and seemed most anxious to appease my righteous indignation.

But we did not place the least reliance on his word when we parted ; and that, thank Heaven, was the last we saw of the skunk.

No porters ever did, of course, arrive to assist us ; and so for days we trudged wearily down the Baro, making short marches, and sending back empty animals from our fresh camps to those vacated in the morning, to bring on the loads left behind under guard. The Abyssinians had looted the Anuaks right and left, as far as the site of the *Faidherbe*, and beyond ; they and their Galla subjects simply living on the country. Where formerly we had passed through thriving happy settlements of naked natives, whose standing crops of corn and clean well-kept huts had given an air of prosperity to the district, we now found deserted hamlets, torn-down fences and overturned granaries. The natives had fled before the ruthless raiding of the Abyssinians, and one could not but feel saddened by the change which had so quickly come over so cheerful a scene of less than three months before.

On April 13th we were overtaken by a party of Abyssinians bearing me a budget of letters from Harrington. It was in answer to mine of March 19th, which I had surreptitiously got through to him, complaining of Walda Gabriel's attitude towards the expedition at Goré. On receipt of my information, Harrington immediately sought

an audience of King Menelek, who expressed himself with much wrath on the difficulties that had been placed in our way. Walda Gabriel was to be summoned forthwith to Addis Abeba, and there publicly punished as an example to other frontier officials. Dejaz Tassama had also promised Harrington to have Walda Gabriel flogged.

The budget contained a letter, too, from King Menelek, granting me freedom of travel anywhere in his dominions, and warning all Abyssinian officials, to whom I might show the letter, that if they failed in affording such assistance as was required of them, they would "pay for it dearly with your skins, because I will punish you very severely." But this was all too late now.

In due course Walda Gabriel was, however, taken to Addis Abeba on foot and in chains, stripped of his rank, and publicly flogged in the market-place. Nevertheless, this flogging was poor compensation for the intended long journey of survey and exploration being wrecked—and all on account of a homely but indispensable Berthon boat. With our greatly reduced carrying power and largely diminished supplies, combined with the late season of the year, when the dreaded rains were already overdue, we were able to do little more.

We did, however, strike south again from the Baro with one camel, six mules and seventy

donkeys, when we were well clear of the hills, leaving such loads as we could not carry in one move with the Anuak chief of Itang village. We came upon several wide swollen rivers, flowing swiftly over the plains from the Abyssinian mountains ; and these would have been quite impossible to cross without the Berthon boat. Not only had the men and loads to be ferried over, but all our transport animals had to be towed across by the boat, as, otherwise, there was every probability of their being carried away and drowned.

We eventually managed to get as far south as the Akobo river ; but were compelled then, owing to the swampy condition of the country, to follow that stream westwards to its junction with the Pibor. There we turned north for Nasser post, where we arrived on May 27th, glad to be on firm ground again. We had been struggling against mud, swamps and heavy rain almost from the first day we left the Baro, and lost many more animals in consequence.

During this detour our last remaining camel had carried the Berthon boat most gallantly through boggy country, until he literally lay down and died in harness on the march. This was a very severe loss as it necessitated throwing away more stores, including two loads of ammunition, to free a mule. The boards were again removed to form a separate load, to enable the lightened

sections to be carried on alternate days by two of the last three Omdurman mules, during the next three weeks. The boat was too long and clumsy for the Abyssinian mules, which are small sturdy animals.

We were delayed some time at Nasser waiting for a steamer and barge to come up the now navigable Sobat; and after picking up the abandoned stores up-stream at Itang, we left finally for Omdurman on June 29th. But Lake Rudolf was only reached by this route the following year, as Bright and I had to return to England to fit out another expedition for that purpose. Thus the Berthon boat was unwittingly responsible for much.

A LOST TRAIN

The advertisement columns of the daily press teem with announcements of losses, ranging from diamond brooches to escaped chimpanzees, and even larger truants. As the father of a family, I can testify to the extraordinary manner in which young hopefuls manage to lose, for a season, some of their most cherished belongings, nigh as big, occasionally, as the humble homes they grace with their presence. But perhaps the most astonishing disappearance within my own personal knowledge is that of an entire freight train, loaded to the gunwale in South Africa with sorely-needed foodstuffs. And the purport of this narrative is an attempt to reconstruct the strange story from memory, after a lapse of a good many years.

All was turmoil and bustle at Mafeking railway station. An urgent message had been received to push up a goods train with supplies for the requirements of a Mashona district far away in the north. The crops there had failed owing to

swarms of locusts invading this area, and devouring the harvest of nearly ripe corn, thus exposing the inhabitants to the dangers of starvation. To alleviate the likely effects of the threatened famine it was imperative that relief should be sent up without delay.

Hence, crowds of Kafirs were toiling and sweating in the sun, loading up the long line of wagons standing in a siding at Mafeking, under the supervision of several whites who had been directed to get the supply train off that night. At length, soon after sundown, the long day's work was done ; and shortly before midnight the heavily-weighted freight train lumbered out of the siding, with much creaking and groaning, to set forth on its slow distant journey to the north.

This was in the early days of opening out the interior of Africa by the sure and certain means of railways ; but the permanent way of this particular line was not yet of the most substantial character. Initial efficiency had been somewhat sacrificed to getting the line through to its destination with dispatch. The country traversed still remained to be exploited, and was in parts but sparsely populated. Stations were few and far between ; and from motives of economy were as yet little more than primitive sun-dried brick structures. Here the single line blossomed temporarily into a double track to admit of the passing

of the very occasional trains proceeding up and down the line from the metropolis in the south to the remote regions in the north, that gave promise in years to come of proving ultimate Eldorados. The lonely existence of these small isolated station staffs was one not to be envied, though they were connected up by a rough telegraph line which stretched the length of the unfinished railway. Their chief excitement was the arrival of perhaps one mixed train northward bound, and one travelling in the opposite direction, every other day. Then the solitary white station-master, and his usually coloured assistant, were able to obtain a few minutes' brief converse with men of their own race who descended upon them from the larger world without.

In addition to grain, the freight train with which we are concerned carried £5,000 of specie and notes in a stout safe, all under charge of a middle-aged Scots guard, Mactavish, who had spent practically his whole life from early manhood in South Africa. He had been connected with the railway extension since its inception, and throughout the period of its construction had not only been employed on laying the permanent way for some time, but subsequently made hundreds of trips up and down the gradually lengthening line as a guard. There was not a yard of it, therefore, that was not familiar to him; and he was universally regarded by the

Company as the most experienced and trustworthy employee of the entire subordinate staff.

The engine-driver was a brother Scot, and a relative of Mactavish, MacDougall by name, who possessed an equally honourable record in his own particular sphere ; and was especially selected to run the relief train to her destination with all possible expedition. The only other occupant of the train was the Kafir stoker, Tom, a burly, cheery rogue, who had long been associated with MacDougall in the fatherly care of one of the most up-to-date goods engines on the line, in which they both took the greatest pride.

It may be said with confidence, therefore, that nothing had been left to chance by the railway officials at Mafeking in order to carry prompt aid to those whose position was becoming parlous, owing to the depredations of the all-consuming locusts in their land. It was anticipated that in three days at most the poor sufferers south of Salisbury would receive sufficient supplies to enable them to maintain themselves for a fortnight or more. By that time it was hoped that arrangements could be made to supplement their needs from districts nearer at hand, which had escaped the ravages of the locusts.

For the first two days after the departure of the relief train her steady progress up the line was duly recorded ; and though there was nothing

break-neck about her speed along the slender thread, still it was in every way quite satisfactory, and pretty well up to schedule time. The comparatively open veldt as far as Tati, with its gentle grades on the high-lying plateau of the interior, had now been left behind ; and a more difficult region of hills, dales, and dense woods entered after the train steamed out of Bulawayo. And it was during the penetration of this relatively wild tract that an ominous silence regarding the movements of the train first became noticeable.

When it failed to reach its destination at the appointed time, frantic telegrams were dispatched down the line from the officials of the afflicted district, the inhabitants of which were beginning to clamour for food. The mixed train which had left the open country some thirty-six hours behind the freight train was quite positive it had not passed the latter at any siding through the hilly region. The next down mixed submitted a report back to the same effect. The whole affair suddenly became shrouded in mystery. The longed-for supply train had completely vanished ; and heavy rains began to fall, which by no means mended matters.

In order to clear up the strange situation, part of a construction train was summoned from rail-head, many miles beyond, to make an examination by day of the region in which the relief train

had been swallowed up, and to render assistance if necessary. It was feared that, when taking some sharp curve on the steep hillside by night, it might have left the flimsy line and plunged head-long into a deep ravine, where it lay shattered and concealed many hundred feet below the track.

In spite of a most careful and extended search of the country, however, no trace of a wrecked train was revealed. All the old gravel pit sidings were then scrutinized, but as the rails were in every case thickly encrusted with the rust of months, and much overgrown by the luxuriant vegetation into which they mostly led for long distances, that offered no solution, either, to the seekers of the vanished train. Thus it seemed as though the entire convoy had been consumed by some fearful and wonderful convulsion of nature, leaving behind no vestige of the train and its valuable contents, but without injuring the line.

As may be imagined, considerable time elapsed before the bewilderment caused by the inexplicable disappearance of the train with its three trustworthy occupants subsided. But immediately the dire intelligence reached Headquarters fresh supplies had to be hurried up to the famine-stricken area to mitigate the sufferings of the natives. Fortunately, a neighbouring district was also able, shortly afterwards, to supply grain in unexpected

quantities, as its inhabitants apparently had a larger surplus in store than previously estimated. The tide of disaster was averted, but the Administration had to pay high prices for the grain brought in by natives from outside.

Life is strenuous in Africa, and gradually the episode came to be regarded as yet another unsolved mystery to be consigned to the limbo of the past. The Company behaved handsomely to the widows of Mactavish and MacDougall, presenting them with generous solatiums for the sad bereavement that had so suddenly and unaccountably befallen them. It furnished them, too, with passages back to their own bonnie Scotland, where they would be among friends and relatives again to share their sorrows.

Now those were hard days for the white trader in the interior of Africa ; and the life of the majority was a never-ceasing struggle for existence against the forces of nature, the suspicion of natives, and the inhospitable character of the country in which they sought a livelihood. Some there were who obtained the bare wherewithal to subsist, as a reward for their dogged courage and pertinacity ; but more failed to support themselves for any length of time ; and few, indeed, were able, towards the close of a strenuous life amid such surroundings, to depart to their homeland with sufficient savings

to secure an *otium cum dignitate* during their declining years.

Yet, despite these drawbacks, adventurous spirits there were in plenty, ever ready to try their luck and test their hardihood in the comparatively little-known regions off the beaten track. One was never sure what the morrow would bring forth; and the pluck of the pioneer, combined with the risks of the gambler, might some day lead to wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. Hence, throughout the length and breadth of Africa were scattered many tough, optimistic Britons who loved the rough life, and were inwardly convinced that they, for sure, had been selected by Providence to reap a rich harvest for their toil in the uncivilized wilds decided upon as their field of endeavour.

Two such cheery optimists were bearing each other company across the rolling highlands that lie between Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa. And to judge by appearances their venture this trip was likely to prove a profitable one, as before them was being driven a grand herd of several hundred long-horned Mashona cattle. Splendid big-framed beasts they were, that should command a lucrative sale by weight on arrival at the seaport of Beira, their destination.

The two whites were assisted in their troublesome task of getting these animals safely to the coast by a party of Mashonas, men who had spent their

lives among cattle. These natives soon learnt to know each individual member of the herd by sight ; and should any of the oxen escape their vigilance, and stray from the line of march, when traversing tracts of thick bush, their absence would be speedily detected on reaching the open, and the wanderers rounded up to rejoin their companions.

Progress was necessarily slow by the unfrequented tracks the traders had elected to follow. Their way lay eastwards through the broken country that intervened between their point of departure, not far from the unfinished railway south of Salisbury, and the coast. Though the country was, for the most part, but thinly populated, it was well watered and afforded good grazing grounds for the cattle at the end of each day's trek—sufficient reasons in themselves to justify the route chosen.

Nevertheless, the anxiety of the traders was great. The country at that period abounded with lions and other carnivora that regarded prime beef as a dainty worthy the seeking. The safety of the cattle by night, therefore, was a consideration of the highest importance ; and the dangers of nocturnal attacks by beasts of prey would certainly be lessened by entering regions where trees and thorn bushes were plentiful, for the construction of zaribas. Within their friendly shelter the

animals should be securely protected during the hours of darkness.

Without recounting in detail the further adventures of the two traders, which would require an article to themselves, it may briefly be stated that they were a month on the road; and that the oxen reached the coast in excellent condition. Consequently they fetched such good prices that, after paying off their attendants for their services, the two whites found themselves several thousand pounds in pocket as the result of their latest enterprise. They decided, therefore, to enjoy a long-looked for holiday in the homeland. Passages were immediately booked in the next homeward-bound steamer that called in at Beira; and the fortunate couple departed from the shores of Africa relatively rich men, and glad to shake the dust of the country off their feet.

Some months after Mesdames Mactavish and MacDougall left for the land of their birth, heavily draped in widows' weeds, a sportsman visiting Rhodesia on a shooting expedition pursued a wounded antelope into thick cover. Whilst forcing his way through this belt of wood and dense undergrowth he suddenly came upon a ghostly array of empty wagons in a partially cleared cutting. His curiosity aroused, closer inspection showed them to be standing on overgrown rails.

Following down the line of trucks led him to an abandoned, rust-bedecked locomotive ; and continuing along the rails he eventually dived through a compact curtain of creepers across the track, and emerged into the open, not far from the point whence this siding branched off from the main line of railway.

He happened to mention this strange discovery later, when camped beside a small roadway station, quite unaware that a goods train had mysteriously disappeared before his advent in the country. The white station-master was considerably taken aback, and at once telegraphed the intelligence to Headquarters. The railway authorities were equally surprised, but promptly despatched officials to investigate the circumstances on the spot.

The siding was one of several that had been carefully inspected at the time of the disappearance of the freight train ; and the rails were even more rusty than when they had shown no indication of being recently traversed. On examining the creeper curtain more minutely, however, it now became apparent that the whole of it could be swung to one side, and be thus secured to permit the passage of a locomotive and train, without injuring the bark or foliage, and then be lowered into its original position again. It was due to the seeming impossibility, at the time, of any traffic having lately passed over this siding that no examina-

tion beyond the curtain had been made of it. Yet, engine and train complete were concealed not many score yards on the far side of the curtain and luxuriant growth that had sprung up and hidden them so effectively and for so long from view.

It is true the rust on the rails had previously appeared to present indisputable evidence that no traffic from the main line could have passed over them of late. Nevertheless, it was equally certain the train could not have reached the secluded spot it now occupied without traversing those few yards of open ground extending to the curtain.

That was a poser. Presently it occurred to one of the examining officials that guard Mactavish had formerly been one of the most experienced platelayers employed by the Company. Happy inspiration! The party trudged through the woods to the far end of the siding, past the derelict engine and abandoned trucks; and there, sure enough, a considerable length of the old original track had been taken up—sufficient, presumably, to relay the portion between the main line and the curtain. And close to the latter, amidst the thick undergrowth, were subsequently ferreted out the discarded rails that apparently had been replaced, after the entire train had passed over them, and probably disturbed the rust of months.

No skeletons of the three luckless men were

discovered ; but the remains of a battered safe, forced open, and its contents palpably rifled, were stumbled upon in the bush ; whilst the long line of trucks stood empty and forlorn, giving no visible clue to what they had originally contained.

It now seemed, beyond the shadow of any doubt, that Mactavish, MacDougall, and cheery Tom had carried out certain laborious and nefarious designs with remarkable skill and secrecy. But the birds had long since flown, and where their present abiding-place was situated it was quite impossible to guess. It was evident, however, they could not have disposed of the many tons of food-stuffs the freight train had carried without outside assistance. The explanation of this is possibly to be found in the fact that the natives of the district adjacent to the locust-invaded area were able to furnish unexpected relief to their neighbours, for which they charged the Administration famine prices. Assuming this solution to be correct, they must have performed this transportation by night, under intelligent direction, very swiftly, and in funereal silence.

Since the Scot is notoriously ubiquitous, it is not unlikely that the two white traders seen trekking through Portuguese territory, driving a valuable herd of Mashona cattle before them to the coast, were friends Mactavish and MacDougall.

They would desire to shun publicity if they obtained all that livestock in exchange for the tons of grain secreted in an obscure siding not far from the intended destination of the freight train.

The probability is heightened when it is stated that, despite his reputation for sobriety and trustworthiness, it was subsequently ascertained that guard Mactavish had lately been gambling recklessly in local stocks and shares during that boom period. He had lost all the savings of his previous thrifty life spent in South Africa by so doing. His bosom friend MacDougall also, it seems, had been badly bitten by the same insane desire to get rich quickly, and had come an unmitigated cropper before setting forth on his last journey in charge of his beloved engine.

The disconsolate widows, I was informed by an Afrikander who travelled home in the same steamer, appeared to have become quite reconciled to their future solitary state, very shortly after sailing from Cape Town. It was either because they rejoiced to be finally quit of two such foolish husbands, having now a fair competence of their own; or because they were building cheerful castles in Spain regarding the years stretching before them. Anyhow, their stay in Glasgow was of brief duration, for they became suspicious of its uncertain atmosphere after the warm sunshine of South

Africa, to which they had long been accustomed. So they resolved to live quietly abroad.

Later developments seem to suggest that it was Portugal, not Spain, which occupied much of their thoughts on their homeward journey, since I learn on unimpeachable authority that two highly respectable couples—Mr. and Mrs. Jones, and Mr. and Mrs. Brown—reside in notably delectable little villas on the bank of the Tagus. They are childless, homely people, with strong Scots accents, notwithstanding their names. This is due, they assure their many friends of the British community, to their lengthy sojourn north of the Tweed, where they made their modest pile in business. Thus they are able now to spend the evening of their days in comparative comfort amid the brighter surroundings of the sunny south, instead of barely existing in the clammy cold of the industrial north. So it is hardly surprising that they should have decided to abscond from our “stormy and unsettled” (B.B.C. weather forecast) English climate.

Lastly, should you ever visit Beira, and keep your eyes carefully skinned, you may possibly alight upon a lusty, smiling, grey-haired Kafir, employed as a wharfage porter. He used to be known as Tom, in days gone by, and still remains a pretty handy man. He is tolerably well to do, I understand; but is a Portuguese subject through force of circumstances. I venture to predict,

320 GUN-RUNNING IN THE GULF

therefore, that if you take him aside, and whisper something in his ear about a lost train in Rhodesia, he will merely answer with a grin, and wink the other eye.

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